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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIAN COURIER

Euromadness

Mike Wevers

Earlier this summer, some of the world's best players took to the fields in Poland and the Ukraine to claim European football supremacy for their countries. But the continent's ongoing turmoil over the survival of its common currency, the Euro, threatens to overshadow the beautiful game's early summer heroics.

Sunday, June 17 was a good day for Greece. Greece beat Russia to move out of the UEFA Euro Cup 2012 group stage and give hope to winning it all. While Greek football players were instilling hope on the pitch, their fellow Greek citizens were reinstilling hope that the Euro remains alive as a common European currency. In its second election in a few short months, the Greeks provided a slim majority to parties, led by New Democracy, supporting the need to keep working with its allies in the Eurozone to solve its debt crisis. That solution involves a bailout of providing much needed funding to the Greek government on condition the government proceed with an austerity package involving spending cuts, social program reductions and increased taxes.

While Euro defenders found comfort in the June election results, the comfort should be cautious. New Democracy captured 30 percent of the vote as the staunchest Euro supporter, but the Syriza Party was close on its heels taking 26 percent. New Democracy has crafted a coalition with the socialist PASOK party, but their government will face strong opposition from Syriza and international lenders may continue to doubt Greece's economic stability.

The leader of Syriza, Alexis Tsipras, sounds much like a Mediterranean Hugo Chavez, without the petro-wealth the Venezuelan revolutionary enjoys to bolster his claims. Tsipras leads a left coalition which wants to rip up any agreement with its European partners and abandon austerity measures. This would mean that Greece would have to abandon the Euro and restore a weak Greek drachma. Greece would be isolated not only within Europe but internationally as well, as not many traders would accept a poor Greek currency as payment for goods.

Greece and Germany

It was somewhat more than ironic that Greece's advance to the quarterfinals in pursuit of the Euro Cup led straight to a match with Germany. The aching of Greek football players to defeat their German rivals on the soccer pitch was in no small measure made more intense because the Greek protests against the Eurozone bailout package have often been targeted at Germany and its leader, Angela Merkel, who is seen as the author of an austerity program which most Greeks thought too harsh. In response, the bailout providers claimed that such suffering was necessary because Greeks had benefited tremendously from generous social programs which neither the country's economic productivity or tax structure could maintain.

Greece is not alone in challenging the longevity of the Euro through years of unbridled government spending. Its neighbour across the Adriatic has its own economic mess, as Italy works out how austere it must be to reduce its government debt. While Greece's debt to GDP (Gross Domestic Product) ratio is a staggering 165 percent, the highest in Europe and fourth highest in the world, Italy is at 120 percent. Our Mediterranean journey further west would take us to Spain, which is struggling to reduce youth unemployment while meeting the demands of foreign creditors for ever higher interest on its debt as Moody downgraded government bonds to just one level above junk status. Spain's debt to GDP ratio, at 80 percent, is much

See **Eurozone** *on page 2*

Greeks voted by a slim majority in favour of parties that would keep them in the Eurozone.

Guilt, grace and social justice: another look at the Belhar

John Bolt

I write these reflections before the 2012 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church meets, and before the final disposition of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confessional standard for the CRC. Whatever synod's decision on the matter, significant denominational issues remain unanswered and this article addresses one of them.

The Belhar Confession was placed on the denominational table by the CRC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. All in all, I judge this to have been a beneficial thing. Being asked to consider the Belhar as a fourth confession for the CRC has challenged us to look carefully at a number of issues that have been simmering in the frying pan of our denominational culture for years, though they have never been adequately and openly discussed. The Belhar Confession is about more than just race, unity and reconciliation, and stands for an agenda of social justice

See **Social justice** *on page 2*

Shelby Steele argues that after the death of Martin Luther King Jr., the American civil rights movement moved away from proclaiming principles of individual dignity, freedom and equality of opportunity to a "social justice" model of trading on white guilt.

News

Euromadness *continued*

We know what Euro Cup victory looks like on the soccer pitch. But what would victory look like for the Eurozone?

better than its Greek and Italian counterparts. However, this ratio has increased significantly in a short time, rising from just 68.5 percent last year, and along with this fact Spain's banking crisis has creditors nervous. Spain's banks suffered huge losses from a boom and bust cycle not dissimilar to the banking crisis the U.S. recently faced. With no access to the market, Spain will require a bailout as well. The financial crisis facing these three Mediterranean neighbours follows bailouts already provided to Iceland and Ireland, whose GDP to debt ratios are 130 percent and 107 percent respectively.

The G20 Nations who were meeting the next day in Mexico welcomed the June 17 election result in Greece. Had the results gone against saving the Euro, the G20 meeting would have been in chaos. The G20 was generally supportive of its European members (United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy and the European Union), but there was some expectation that the Eurozone had the capacity to solve its debt crisis using its own resources, supplemented by the International Monetary Fund as necessary.

The primary agent in the Eurozone solution is Germany; hence Angela Merkel's resolve to not let countries in the midst of debt crises to drift away from their austerity packages. If Germany is going to finance a bailout, it needs some assurance that recipient countries will, to put it bluntly, behave, especially since it is feeling more isolated in emphasizing the need for austerity. France was a stronger partner in this resolve prior to its election; however, it returned a Socialist president and parliamentary majority who are softer on austerity and open to more government spending to stimulate moribund economies. The United Kingdom, which must be rejoicing at never having joined the Euro, will be supportive and play some role in bailouts, as the Eurozone is its major trading partner.

Canadian strength

Canada's economy continues to outperform most of the world, not entirely unrelated to how well we manage our banking system and some of the austerity measures already undertaken. This sound economic standing has emboldened Prime Minister Harper to take a strong position that the solution to the Euro crisis lies within the Eurozone. Hence, our Prime Minister has taken to lecturing the Europeans, stating that Europe must strengthen its economic union and money management by centralizing more economic decision making. This would weaken individual nations' abilities to manage their economies. Harper is not alone in this recommendation. To many economists, it's either move to a more centralized financial management model or abandon the common currency.

Canadians may remember that this issue arose in the 1995 sovereignty (separatist) debate in Quebec. The Quebec pro-sovereignty leader, Jacques Parizeau, famously concluded that Canada and a sovereign Quebec would maintain the Canadian dollar as a common currency. Of course there were no assurances that this would have been the case if the separatist cause had won the referendum, which it very nearly did. Jacques Parizeau never had to face the question of how curtailed Quebec's sovereignty would have been to maintain a common currency, unlike many nations in Europe who are facing that very prospect.

Although European Economic Union has been a post-war panacea for peace and prosperity in the region, it is unclear whether the member nations are ready to surrender even more power for the common good. This will continue to play out over the next year, not unlike many a European football match with no clear final result, settling on a draw. Sides will sometimes seem to move horrendously slow (according to Canadian hockey fans), but occasionally an attack will proceed and enliven play only to be rebuffed by a solid defence. There will be one clear winner of the UEFA 2012 Euro Cup this summer (which, at press time, still isn't known), who will hold the cup high in victory. What victory looks like to the Eurozone is more uncertain. All Eurozone member nations now appear to want a strong Euro uniting a stronger Europe, but will they be willing to pay the price to get there? The world is watching.

Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister. He lives in Edmonton, and was saddened by Holland's early departure from Euro Cup 2012.

Social justice *continued*

that has come to occupy our denominational public life. Even a casual look through the pages of the monthly *Banner* or the CRCNA website will confirm this. This is an enormous subject and cannot be treated fully here, so I will restrict myself to looking at only one issue: the new soteriology (doctrine of salvation) that is implied in this social gospel and clearly proposed in the Belhar Confession.

The traditional Christian and Reformed doctrine of salvation is straightforward: we are all sinners, totally incapable of any saving good and all stand under the just judgment of God; Christ's death is the atoning all-sufficient sacrifice for our sin; we are saved by faith alone in Christ as our substitute, and through his merit we are adopted as children of God; our guilt is removed and we are set free to love and serve our Lord. Some critics of this doctrine claim that while it works for individuals there is no application to social sins such as racism or militarism or consumerism. For this we need a different model, and part of the pull of the Belhar Confession is that it offers one.

White guilt

I came to greater clarity about the alternative soteriology offered by the Belhar Confession, among others, after re-reading Shelby Steele's book *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*. Steele is an African-American scholar of race relations in America with profound personal experience in the racial reality about which he writes. His thesis is that after Martin Luther King Jr.'s death in 1968, the civil rights movement in the United States moved away from proclaiming *principles* of individual dignity, freedom and equality of opportunity to a "social justice" model of trading on white guilt. Greater power for blacks was won by asking whites to acknowledge their racism, publicly disassociate themselves from it, and then accede to demands for whatever was asked of them.

Here is how it works: There is no question that America as a nation has sinned against its black citizens. From slavery to Jim Crow our black brothers and sisters have been treated as second class. Slavery and its legacy is the dark stain on the American soul, and guilt is appropriate here. But now, almost a half century after the struggle to achieve full civil rights for blacks was won, the reality of life for far too many blacks in America remains tragically dismal. The promise of the civil rights movement remains quite unfulfilled. Full equality under the law does not automatically or quickly translate into fulfilling and productive citizenship. For those of us who live in Michigan, for example, all we need to do is to say "Detroit" to come face to face with this tragedy.

The next step, according to Steele, is to recognize that thanks to slavery and racism white America has lost its moral authority, an authority that included the Judeo-Christian moral structure along with civic and bourgeois values of hard work, thrift, delayed gratification, moral respectability, honour and duty. Steele interprets the radical turn of the 1960s as a response to the lack of moral authority in general. America itself was now judged to be fatally flawed in its history and practice, and redemption could only be found by disassociating oneself from it. To be a morally good person was to sit in judgment on America, on its racism, its materialism, its militarism, its sexism, etc. Furthermore, this also meant intentionally identifying and associating with those who had been marginalized and victimized by America's history and practice. To be a "redeemed" person – redeemed from the sinful corporate life of America – was to stand in judgment on America and stand with its victims and enemies. The net impact was a radical transformation of American morality that we have come to identify with the sexual revolution, the anti-war movement, etc.

Disassociating and associating

This posture of disassociating and associating as the path to salvation invites all kinds of response, but I am going to restrict myself to a theological assessment. With the obvious exception of Adam's sin, the very notion of corporate guilt is problematic. But, for the sake of argument, let us grant the premise that nations sin and are guilty. Can a nation do anything more than its level best to remedy the injustice or evil done by changing its course? Is it permissible to use even appropriate guilt as a vehicle for gaining new advantage that might itself be unjust? When would this stop? At what point could one say that a nation has atoned for its sin? As complicated and demanding as this question is for a nation, it seems to me that the more important question is whether it is at all appropriate for the church of Jesus Christ to use guilt in this way.

I am convinced that the answer is a resounding "No!" When it comes to the gospel there is absolutely nothing we can do ourselves to atone for our sins. Either Christ paid for our sins, completely covers our guilt, and sets us free to serve, or he does not and there is still stuff we need to do. Please note that I am not talking about the Christian life of sanctification in which we pray for the Holy Spirit to empower us to grow in acting more like our Saviour. When it comes to loving our neighbour, to overcoming barriers of race or demonstrating our compassion and concern for justice, there is plenty on our plate. My difficulty with the Belhar is not at this level.

When it comes to making the Belhar a standard for the CRC the question for me comes down to this: What does the Belhar's insistence that God stands with the poor and marginalized – and that we must stand with God in this if we are to be true to the gospel – really mean? I think this issue is at least ambiguous and that it is possible the authors of the Belhar had in mind the very pattern of finding salvation in disassociating and associating that I have briefly summarized above. If so, then we have a different gospel altogether. My concern is that in our desire to do good we are in fact accumulating more guilt without providing the gospel of grace as the only remedy for it. Simply choosing for or against the Belhar leaves this matter unsettled in our church.

John Bolt is an ordained Christian Reformed minister and Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. He has also taught at Redeemer College and Calvin College.

Column

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

I know. I did that, too.

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

– Soren Kierkegaard

Teenagers: You think we don't know you. You think we don't understand. You think that what you're going through, right now, is different.

We know. We did that, too.

But you won't believe us. After all, we didn't believe our own parents, when they said it. We looked at them the same way you look at us now. As though their age was some kind of tropical disease – remote, fascinating and unlikely to strike us. We woke up one morning, and the dad who only yesterday was strong, capable and smart had become frail, dated and foolish. The mom we had clung to with love, we shrugged off, embarrassed. You've done that to us.

We know you. We did that, too. But you won't believe us. After all, we were young 20 or 30 years ago. For you, that's more than a lifetime ago. But for us, a song on the radio is all it takes to break the dam of memory, and drown us in a deluge of old crushes and hurts, of first times and last chances. And when the music plays we are there. We are standing, in our mind's eye, where we were 30 years ago, as fresh and frail as we were then. And you tell us to change the station, because you see us getting weak and wistful.

We know you. We did that, too. But you won't believe us. After all, when our own parents told us stories of their youth – of living through the war, or swing-dancing along to Big Band music, or about the people they'd loved before they met our mom or dad – we felt uncomfortable. Not because we didn't believe our parents had ever been young, but because we were afraid to admit it to ourselves. And when we talk about hair metal, video arcades and the one boy we sat behind in every class in high school, who smelled like the fresh air outside, we see you squirming.

We know you. We did that, too. Here's the thing, teenagers: You think you're the misunderstood ones. You think we don't get you.

We know you. We did that, too. And we were wrong. We see that now.

'When we talk about hair metal [and] video arcades ... we see you squirming.'

Misunderstood

Now we realize that it's not teenagers who are misunderstood, but adults. After all, we've been where you are. You haven't been here, yet. Unfortunately, the only way we can prove it – by getting older – destroyed all our credibility in the process. So we can tell you that you don't get us, but you won't believe us.

As long as there have been children who feel misunderstood, there have been parents trying to make themselves understood. And we're no different. We want you to know how we feel.

The thing is, when we try to keep you on the straight and narrow, it's not because we distrust you but because it's our job. Actually, we have faith in you. Because we understand what you do not. We understand that what you're going through is a stage in your life that – while it will transform you, and stay with you for the rest of your life – will end, ultimately. We got through it. And so, we have faith that you will, too. We believe in you.

We're also hopeful. On your best days, your passion for life – the movies and games and music you introduce us to – help us feel young and connected. And even on your worst day, when you are disagreeable and difficult and argumentative, we know that inside you, somewhere, is the child who held our hand on the walk to the bus, and snuggled up to us for bedtime stories, and that someday, when you get through these rough few years, you will become the men and women you were always going to be.

Love

And here is what you must always remember: that when we look at you, what we feel above all, is love. Not only because we are your parents and we are supposed to. But because more than anyone else in the world, we understand you best. We were there when you were born. We were there when you discovered your gifts, and found out what you love to do. We have seen you grow and change and become more like us with each passing day – something you will never understand or admit, until you have children of your own.

That is when you will realize the truth of what the philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard once wrote: "life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

But that is the beauty of scripture, too. The beauty of the way God describes himself as a loving father. As children, it is comforting to know God as a father. But as we grow into adults, and move into middle age, or become grandparents, the truth of God's fatherly love for us is revealed to us more deeply with each passing year. The longer we live, and the more time we have to look back on, the more we experience the depth of love and understanding we have for our own children – through all the stages of their lives – the more profoundly the love of God speaks to us.

And when he says: "I have created you and cared for you since you were born. I will be your God through all your lifetime, Yes, even when your hair is white with age. I made you and I will care for you," what he is really saying is this: "I know you better than anyone else in the world. I have seen you grow and change and become more like me with each passing day. As you are with your children, so I am with you."

Or, to put it another way: "I know you. I did that, too."

And I love you.

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Editorials

In the desert: anger

Brian Bork

This article is part of an ongoing series of reflections on the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, a group of third century monks, nuns, hermits and ascetics who sought spiritual wisdom by living in the desert.

When I was a teenager I loved listening to Rage Against The Machine. They were the kind of band that could raise a 16-year-old's blood pressure out his ears: aggressive, Led Zeppelin-size guitar riffs with hip-hop vocals and a revolutionary political stance somewhere to the left of Che Guevara. I remember being particularly fond of a moment in one of their early songs: the band falls silent for an instant, and the lead singer hisses "anger is a gift." After a brief, fervid interlude, the band kicks it back up into a maelstrom of swirling guitars, drums and, well, *rage*.

At that age, it's quite easy to think there's something romantic about screaming at the world, railing against everything and smashing up your guitar afterward. For whatever reason, adolescence seems to be primetime for the throes of passion.

Of course, anger isn't just a habit of teenagers, or one of those stages we leave behind on the path to adulthood. I don't rage against a great deal these days, and I don't consider myself to have a particularly angry disposition, but I can't help but notice how quickly anger still whips in, like some fattening thunder clouds heralding a surprise storm at sea. Put me behind the wheel in gridlock traffic, and before you know it I'm wiping foam off my chin in indignation at the brainless idiot in the car ahead of me.

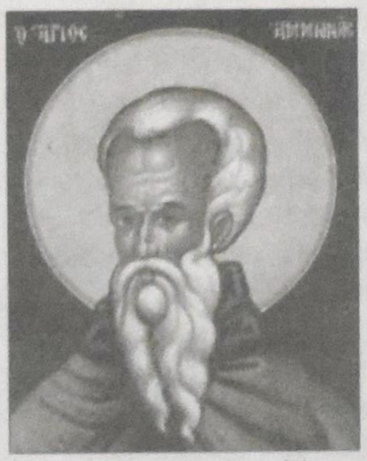
I may have grown up some, but I'll confess it's still really easy to see anger as a gift, or at least as something very useful. It's profoundly empowering; few emotions help one grab control of a situation faster than a hot nose and some rattling jowls. In an argument, it's a devastating weapon, swiftly disarming and overpowering one's opponent. And surely we can't discount the usefulness of "righteous" anger – that feeling we get from being incensed at the evil and injustice all around us. After all, there's that story of Jesus harrowing the temple, right? No doubt that was brought on by a spell of righteous indignation. (A related aside: I've often noticed how we quickly reach for this story when we're looking to justify our own anger. Rarely do we draw from Jesus' other famous words about anger: that if we're angry with our brother or sister, we're subject to the same judgment as murderers).

Though we may admit its usefulness, I'd say that Christians are, for the most part, unsettled by anger. It's not the sort of thing we tend to praise or cultivate. Yet I get the sense that we've more or less acquiesced to the reality that anger happens. It's just one of those things that we might not like a whole lot, but if it helps get the job done then so be it. In fact, this all seems to square away quite well with the common secular anthropological assumption that anger is a natural and normative emotion that ought to be let out from time to time. Keeping it all crammed up inside isn't natural; it's actually psychologically damaging.

Rescued from anger

The Desert Fathers and Mothers offer a profound challenge to this perceived wisdom. Theirs is a different anthropology, one that affirms that we're created for virtue and purity. Anger is, then, not something to be strategically deployed, in an effort to take the pressure off, or to use to our advantage. Instead, they tell us we need to be *rescued* from anger. Abba Ammonas exemplifies this understanding well, claiming to have spent 14 years praying to God day and night to be delivered from anger.

According to our ancient brothers and sisters, this sin-wounded world has given anger a particularly virulent power. It is parasitic; a spiritual toxin. In fact, they take a harder line against anger than almost any other spiritual affliction. They warn us that anger rattles loose the connection between God and humanity. It puts cracks in the soul – fissures that provide passage for demons to work their way into our very depths. Anger corrupts prayer, and fractures our relationships with our neighbours. It contaminates everything it touches, even our good and righteous works: Abba Agatho asserts this boldly, declaring that "an angry man is not accepted in the Kingdom of God, even if he raises the dead!"



Abba Ammonas spent 14 years praying to God day and night to be delivered from anger.

This is why the desert witness counsels so strongly against anger. It's insidious and powerful, and we're deceiving ourselves if we think we can harness it to our advantage. Even righteous indignation is called into question, for it's just the thin edge of the wedge that allows anger's corrupting energy into our hearts.

This is a hard line, one that seems nearly impossible to live up to. I'll confess I've scarcely spent 14 minutes asking to be delivered from anger (which is undoubtedly why I can get bent out of shape by something as inconsequential as a traffic jam). Yet along this hard line we can find encouragement, too. The desert witness tells us anger can be cleansed from our hearts, through prayer, humility, inward watchfulness and by streams of tears. It can be overcome, its place filled by a deep holiness.

My favourite story from the desert illustrates as much. It's the one of Isidore, a desert priest, who was asked "why are the demons so afraid of you?" He replied: "it is because ever since I became a monk, I have striven to prevent anger from rising to my lips."

I suppose we could engage in the risky business of getting angry, allowing it to rise to our lips on occasion, and hope to control it or direct it toward a useful end. But wouldn't we rather cultivate the kind of holiness that frightens demons?

Brian Bork is the CRC campus minister at the University of Waterloo & Wilfrid Laurier University. He occasionally wheezes his way through a long jog, and confesses that a little Rage Against The Machine on the iPod helps him make it through those last few miles.

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The Hunger Games

Michael Buma

You're a high power Hollywood film executive. I'm about to pitch you an idea for a movie, and it's your job to decide whether or not to go ahead with production.

Here it is in a nutshell: the film is about a post-apocalyptic world in which teenagers are picked by lottery and forced to fight each other to the death in a kind of reality game show competition.

You'd say "yes," right?

Probably not. But if you did, it turns out that you'd make a killing at the box office (no pun intended). Many readers will recognize that I'm talking about *The Hunger Games*, a recent film based on a bestselling young-adult novel of the same name by Suzanne Collins. The novel is the first instalment of a trilogy, and given the enormous success of *The Hunger Games* film it seems almost certain that we can expect follow-up instalments.

For anyone unfamiliar with *The Hunger Games*, the basic premise is as follows: post-apocalyptic North America – known in the fictional universe of the story as Panem – consists of 12 outlying districts governed by a central metropolis known only as the Capital. At one point there was a 13th district that rose up in rebellion against the Capital, but it has since been destroyed. As punishment for the insurrection and to reassert the power of the ruling class, one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18 are chosen from each district to compete as "tributes" in the Hunger Games, a yearly fight-to-the-death reality television entertainment event. The story begins when 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen volunteers to take part in the Hunger Games on behalf of District 12 in place of her sister, whose name is chosen in the annual selection lottery. Without giving away too much, the film follows through with its central premise and most of the child competitors in the Hunger Games end up dead.

Who would want to read or watch this? Why would a story about teenagers being forced to kill each other strike such a chord?

There are a few obvious answers, I suppose. Despite relying rather heavily on some annoying *deus ex machina* moments to extricate characters from difficult situations and intractable moral dilemmas, the plot of *The Hunger Games* is quite engaging. It succeeds fairly well as a dynamic and interesting story, and uses the same love triangle convention that made the *Twilight* series so popular as the central basis for its character tensions. But the true genius of *The Hunger Games* is in the idea rather than the execution.

Cultural anxieties

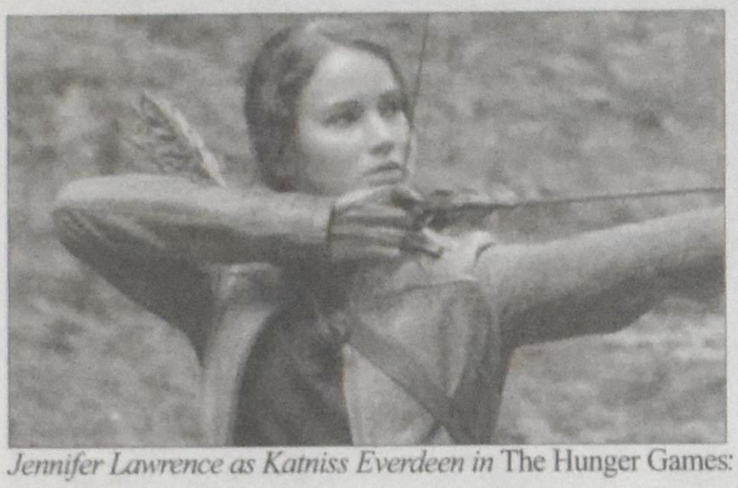
Popular culture frequently works by dealing with pertinent social themes and relevant cultural anxieties in ways that are recognizable but slightly displaced. Texts that work in this way seek to dwell in and (to some extent) process the fears, uncertainties, preoccupations and sensitive issues of their time. For instance, the *X-Men* film franchise is a thinly-veiled gay rights parable, while *The Dark Knight* Batman film deals with American attitudes toward terrorism and civil liberties in the post-9/11 era. Read in this way – as a means of visiting pertinent social issues in a displaced and therefore non-threatening and somewhat de-politicized way – *The Hunger Games* is pretty much the perfect cultural text for the present historical moment.

This claim could be borne out in much greater detail than I have space for here, but let me make the nutshell case for several ways in which *The Hunger Games* deals with contemporary issues and anxieties. First, the Hunger Games competition is essentially an elaborate reality TV show. The decadence and moral decay of the Capital is made glaringly evident by its garish tastes and outlandish fashion sense, and upon their arrival Katniss and her fellow tributes are given full makeovers so that they conform to the standards demanded by this ugly image-obsessed society. Furthermore, Katniss and her fellow District 12 tribute Peeta are encouraged to put on a "star-crossed lovers" routine to heighten the dramatic tension of the show

Editorial/Letter

The Hunger Games *continued*

and win sponsors over to their cause. All of this, of course, reveals what we already know: that there is very little "reality" involved in reality TV. Later, when Katniss and the other tributes are actually in the game, we see that circumstances are equally contrived and that the outcome can effectively be engineered by the show's producers.



Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen in The Hunger Games:

More interesting than the insight that reality TV isn't real, however, is the way in which *The Hunger Games* asks us to question the ethics of deriving entertainment from the close details of other peoples' emotional vulnerability. Watching Katniss and her opponents deal with the trauma and stresses of the competition while at the same time negotiating interviews and (with the help of their handlers) cultivating images and seeking out sponsorships isn't very far removed from watching the Kardashian sisters or cast of Jersey Shore psychologically self-destruct on national television. Other appropriate analogues could be constructed with reality TV competitions like *Survivor*, *Fear Factor*, *American Gladiator, Mantracker* and perhaps even *Wipeout*, all of which seek to some degree to entertain their audiences by intruding on the contrived physical and/or emotional vulnerability of contestants.

Violent sports

The most extreme and authentic form of violent reality TV in our culture, of course, takes place in professional sports, and *The Hunger Games* invites comparison here as well. Given what we're starting to learn about the seriousness of concussions and the debilitating long-term effects of participation in violent sports, *The Hunger Games* invites us to consider whether Monday night football might simply be a protracted version of the fictional Hunger Games in which contestants suffer long term decay rather than immediate death. There are, of course, differences, such as the fact that professional athletes are compensated very well for the physical risks they take and are by no means coerced into pursuing athletic careers. But *The Hunger Games* seems to get at the problematic way in which we dehumanize our athletes, thereby allowing ourselves to tolerate their suffering and, indeed, be entertained by it. Not long after Katniss and the other tributes arrive in the Capital, they're put through a skills competition in which they're ranked based on their abilities and likelihood for success. For anyone who's ever watched an NFL or NHL scouting combine – a process in which prospects are tested physically and psychologically prior to the draft – this scene will be eerily familiar.

Another extreme form of reality TV in our culture is the fact that our wars are now televised. Via "embedded journalists" who tell the army-sanctioned story about what's going on in Iraq and Afghanistan, we're able to see some of the action in these conflict zones on the big screens in our living rooms. The actual fighting in the Hunger Games competition obviously evokes this violence-as-infotainment ethos, but the Hunger Games is rather surprisingly up-front about the traumatizing psychological consequences that such an experience would produce. In the first book and film we see this with Katniss' mentor, Haymitch Abernathy, a former victor in the Hunger Games competition from District 12 who has resorted to alcohol as a way of dealing with the psychological toll of his experience. Although I haven't read the later books, apparently Katniss ends up dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of her Hunger Games experience – just like many veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Another relevant contemporary theme explored by *The Hunger Games* is the Occupy Wall Street movement and the idea of the one percent versus the 99 percent. The decadent and morally corrupt citizens of the Capital, of course, are the one percent, and use the Hunger Games not only as a form of entertainment but as a way of asserting their hegemony over the outlying districts where life is difficult and resources are scarce. As the Games proceed, however, we see the oppressive control of the ruling class challenged when one of the tributes from District 11 is killed and riots break out. Like I said, I haven't read the later books, but let me venture a pretty safe plot prediction: Katniss, Peeta and the other guy will lead some kind of revolution in the districts and ultimately end up overthrowing their Capital-ist oppressors (see what I did there?).

High school

Finally, and perhaps most saliently, *The Hunger Games* is an extended metaphor for high school and the adolescent social experience. Writing in the *New Yorker*, Laura Miller sums up this reading as follows: "The rules are arbitrary, unfathomable and subject to sudden change. A brutal social hierarchy prevails, with the rich, the good-looking and the athletic lording their advantages over everyone else. To survive you have to be totally fake. Adults don't seem to understand how high the stakes are; your whole life could be over, and they act like it's just some 'phase'! Everyone's always watching you, scrutinizing your clothes or your friends and obsessing over whether you're having sex or taking drugs or getting good enough grades, but no one cares who you really are or how you really feel about anything." It's very true that today's teenagers are under a great deal of pressure, and *The Hunger Games* puts its finger on some of these fears and frustrations quite well.

One more reading of potential interest is the idea of *The Hunger Games* as a Christian allegory. Several pastors and priests have written articles or made TV appearances arguing that both Katniss and Peeta function as Christ figures (Peeta, especially, exemplifies substitutionary sacrifice and even experiences a sort of resurrection), and some churches have formed *Hunger Games*-themed Bible studies to capitalize on the series' success. Although I take these readings with a grain of salt and worry somewhat about Christian culture trying too hard to accommodate itself to the latest trend, I do think Christians should pay attention to the popularity of *The Hunger Games* and to the serious issues it addresses.

Michael Buma teaches in the English and Kinesiology departments at the University of Western Ontario and is interim editor of the Christian Courier.

Steyn vs. Hedges

I would like to thank the *CC* for bringing authors Chris Hedges and Mark Steyn to my attention (see *CC* Jan. 9 and April 9). I've been fascinated by their books (*Death Of The Liberal Class* by Hedges and *After America* by Steyn) because both write so compellingly about the decline of America. What truly interests me is how they contradict one another. It occurs to me that if you read one of these authors it is very important that you also read the other so that you avoid the danger of accepting an unbalanced point of view. I'll summarize their ideas so that you can see what I mean.

In Mark Steyn's world the bad guys are the bleeding heart liberals. His story goes like this: The evil liberals use their strong lobbying power to increase government control of everything. This puts a stranglehold on the once vigorous economic engine of American capitalism. American business is squashed under the burden of unnecessary environmental regulations, heavy taxes and infuriating bureaucracy. To make matters worse, the liberal agenda of supporting the lazy jobless population results in staggering, unsustainable debt to China and erodes the good old fashioned "can do" spirit that once characterized the average American citizen. The liberal demand for political correctness and tolerance has put unnecessary limits on U.S. military engagements, and as a result the world is a dangerous place. America today is threatened and unsustainable, and will ultimately collapse like another European economic basket case. After the collapse there will be no more military protection against the hordes of rapidly reproducing Muslim terrorists, and the Western World will face Armageddon. The only hope is to rebel against big government control and be willing to ramp up the military strength needed to protect Western democracy.

In Chris Hedges' world the bad guys are the evil, greedy multinational corporations. His story goes like this: Large corporations use their strong lobbying power and behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing to take over the government and make democracy an illusion. Corporate control of government leads to a climate of unfettered capitalism, which in turn has a devastating effect on the environment, the working poor and the political stability of the world. U.S. government debt balloons out of control as the corporate elite raid the public treasury with impunity. Large corporations benefit immensely from the war economy sustained by America's military presence in resource rich areas of the world. U.S. bombs sow the seeds of radical Islam by terrorizing civilian populations in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. The rising number of terrorists then justify further military intervention, and so it goes. The situation is unsustainable and will collapse in a mess of global environmental catastrophe and Dark Age feudalism. The only hope is to rebel against the greedy corporate agenda and fight for strict controls on big business. The U.S. must also back down from its military operations so that democratic institutions can grow in a climate free from crisis and fear.

As you can see, Hedges and Steyn are pulling pretty hard in opposite directions. The main advantage of reading both is that the fear caused by one is cancelled out by the other. But if you're like me, you'll be left with the nagging worry that Hedges is right and that Steyn is merely serving the corporate agenda.

Harry Kooy
Kitchener, Ont.

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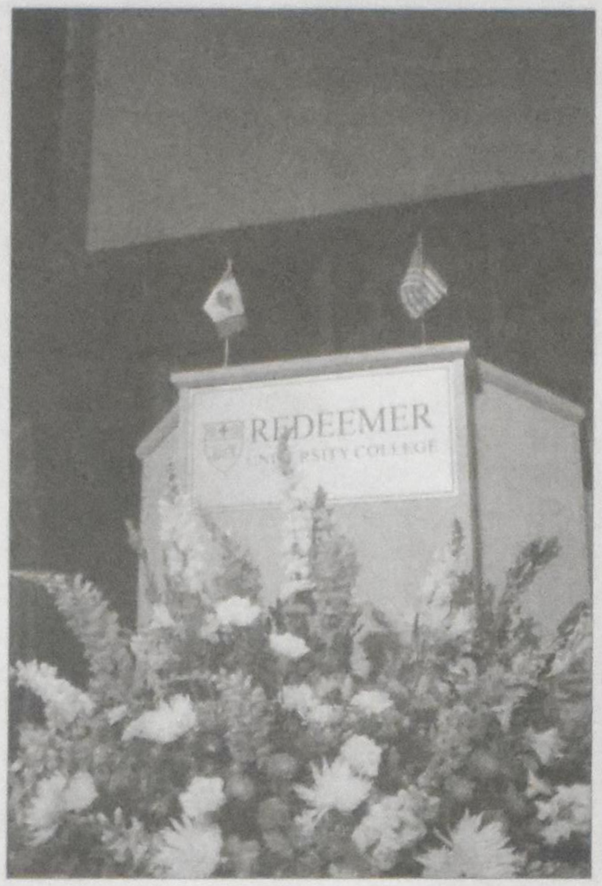
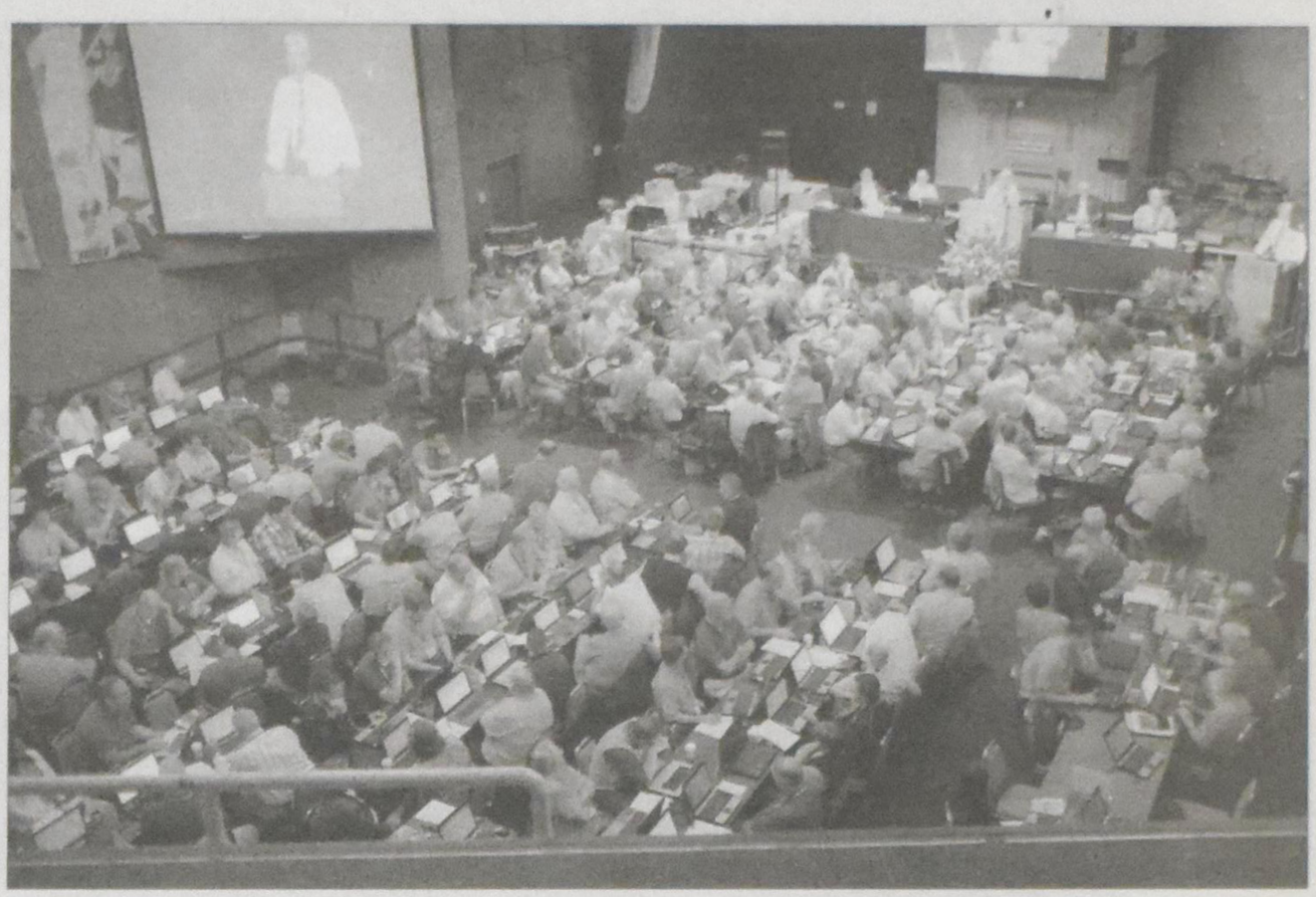
Christian Reformed Church Synod summary





ANCASTER, Ont. (CRCNA) – This year's general synod of the Christian Reformed Church had its heated moments, as almost every annual synod does. But Synod 2012 also held notable instances of compromise and reconciliation, especially when delegates deliberated on what to do with the Belhar Confession and how to approach "creation care."

Belhar Confesson not a 'confession'

Delegates debated the status of the Belhar Confession for more than three hours one evening. The Belhar was written by some of the Reformed churches in South Africa as response to the struggle there over apartheid.

The issue was whether the Belhar is universal enough and of a nature that it should be adopted by the denomination as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Given that this was the most talked-about and prayed-about issue facing synod, many people gathered to watch and listen to the debate at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont., where synod was meeting. Hundreds of others watched via the synod webcast.

But instead of the polarized debate that many expected, Synod 2012 steered a steady, carefully-balanced course. In a compromise decision, synod voted to place the Belhar in a new category of "Ecumenical Faith Declarations" rather than adopt it as a fourth confession.

While not putting it on a par with the historic Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession, this will still allow Christian Reformed congregations to read and study it as an important document that addresses racial and social unity, justice and reconciliation.

Global warming and creation stwardship

Prior to synod, the issue of climate change, popularly known as global warming, and the CRC's Creation Stewardship report on the topic, also drew a great deal of discussion among delegates and other church members.

The debate was primarily between people who strongly believe – as did the members of the church's Creation Stewardship Task Force – that human beings are the major cause of climate change and between those who equally strongly believe that there is not enough scientific data to prove a primary human cause.

The discussion by delegates to synod was lengthy and reflected a range of opinions, but in the end delegates spoke almost with one voice. A majority voted to accept the recommendations of the report and to direct congregations to address the compelling need for Christians to care for God's world.

In adopting the creation stewardship report, synod also recommended that churches and members should learn all that they can, and then to do all that they can, to address ecological and energy-resource problems.

Other Synod 2012 decisions:

- Adjudicated a dispute between Classis Quinte and Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Belleville, Ont.
- Decided to set aside the CRC's historic Form of Subscription in favour of a new Covenant for Officebearers. The "covenant" will be used by the churches "as a means to encourage ongoing, vital engagement of officebearers with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions." The previous Form of Subscription, signed by every officebearer, had been used since the early 20th century.
- Agreed to change the name of CRWRC to World Renew. A majority of delegates saw the change as advantageous, assuming it would make it easier to work in partnership with other organizations and to work in predominantly Muslim countries.
- Restored a requirement that public profession of faith include a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the CRC. Synod 2011 had removed the requirement from the Church Order. Synod also asked the Faith Formation Committee to review the matter and determine where this requirement might best fit in the Church Order.
- Declined to appoint a committee to study to what extent the church should speak out on controversial issues that become politicized. But synod did ask the task force studying the church's structure and culture to take note of the concern some people expressed about the church speaking on issues on their behalf. It instructed the CRC's executive director to write a pastoral letter to the churches, urging them to reflect on the extent to which the church should advocate or lobby on controversial issues.
- Ratified the appointment of Rev. Kurt Selles as the new director of Back to God Ministries International (BGMI). Selles, a former Christian Reformed World Missions missionary and teacher, will take up his new post in August. Synod also recognized with appreciation the work of Rev. Jimmy Tae-On Lin as interim director of BGMI, which works in media ministry worldwide in 10 languages. Synod also noted with sadness the passing of the former director, Rev. Robert Heerspink.
- Thanked Rev. William Koopmans and Rev. Peter Borgdorff for the work they did as leading members of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), and especially as they brought the issue of the Belhar Confession before churches and before synod this year.
- Endorsed *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, the new joint CRC-RCA (Reformed Church in America) hymnal. The endorsement followed a presentation describing the hymnal by representatives of Faith Alive Christian Resources, the publishing ministry of the CRC and resource provider for the Reformed Church in America (RCA).
- Acknowledged the retirements of ministers and ministry associates and then prayed for these ministers as they move into retirement.
- Changed the name of ministry associates to "commissioned pastors" to better reflect the scope and practice of the ministries that they perform. Also, the change was made to encourage others to study and to train to be commissioned pastors.

New president for Calvin College

Synod also heard from and thanked Gaylen Byker for his 17 years of service as president of Calvin College and interviewed and ratified the appointment of Michael Le Roy as new president of Calvin College.

Missiology sem prof from B.C. approved

It also approved the appointment of Rev. Michael Goheen as a professor of missiology at Calvin Theological Seminary. Goheen has served as the Geneva Professor of Worldview and Religious Studies at Trinity Western University in British Columbia and has written widely and published books on the topic of missions.

On its final morning, synod dealt with the remaining sections of the Creation Stewardship report and also formally noted that the status of "Our World Belongs to God," the Contemporary Testimony, is unchanged by the adoption of the new Covenant for Officebearers, which makes reference to the Contemporary Testimony.

Young adults hold 'summit'

Nearly 70 young adults attended re:kindle, a leadership summit put on by the Young Adult Leadership Task Force (YALT). Most of them, ages 18 to 31, were nominated by local pastors and congregations to attend the conference after showing leadership in their home churches. The summit took place in Ancaster just as Synod 2012 was convening. During the summit, the group gathered to worship, listen to speakers, watch short films and discuss issues facing young adults. They also divided up into small groups for discussion and devotions each night.

News

Another Ontario public school board bans Gideon Bibles

HAMILTON, Ont. (LifeSiteNews.com) – Trustees of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board voted last month to ban the distribution of Gideon Bibles in their schools, marking an end to a long tradition of giving Grade 5 students – with parental consent – their own copy of the Scriptures.

School boards in Toronto, Peel, Durham, York and Bruce counties have already banned the Bibles.

The Gideons, an evangelical association based in Nashville, Tenn., have been placing Bibles containing the New Testament plus the Psalms and Proverbs from the Old Testament in Canadian public schools since 1936.

"We have institutions that do this already and they're called churches," said board chair Tim Simmons, according to a *Hamilton Spectator* report. "Maybe churches need to look at the job they do to provide this type of material and not put it on a public school system where we don't have the resources, we don't have the manpower, we don't have the knowledge, the understanding, the expertise," said Simmons.

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's superintendent of equity, engagement and system programs, Sharon Stephanian, said the Bible was banned in order to bring the board in line with the Ontario Ministry of Education's "Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy."

'Safe, equitable, inclusive'?

"When we looked at what was happening in other school boards and some of the rationale around reversing the practice, we felt that we needed to look at ours and do the same," said Stephanian. "Ultimately it's about creating those safe, equitable and inclusive environments for all students, where all religions are respected and valued."

The strategy, which was launched by the McGuinty government in April 2009, requires every school board in the province to develop an "equity policy" that outlines their commitment to "inclusion" based on grounds listed in the Ontario Human Rights Code, including "sexual orientation." The boards are expected to revise all policies and practices to align with the policy.

Critics have called the equity policy "a program of child indoctrination" that "represents a frontal assault on the moral and religious values of a majority of parents, and a trampling of their parental rights."

Kelvin Warkentin, communications manager for the Gideons International in Canada, told the *Spectator* his organization was "extremely disappointed" in the board's decision to ban the distribution of Bibles, but noted that The Gideons' response has always been to co-operate with such dictates.

"We recognize that offering a Testament to students is a privilege allowed by school boards, not an inherent right," he said, adding that The Gideons believe there is a place for religious study in public schools. "We need to teach our children respect for other religions and the best way to accomplish that is to make sure they understand them better," Warkentin said.

Ancient sermons by early church father discovered

VATICAN CITY (NOR) – The Vatican newspaper has reported that 29 previously unpublished sermons said to be the work of an important and prolific early church father have been discovered in a German library.

The third century theologian Origen of Alexandria is considered to have played a critical role in the development of Christian thought. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI, himself a theologian, dedicated two of his own weekly church teaching sessions to the importance of Origen's life and work. However, Origen was accused of adulterating the gospel with pagan philosophy. Three centuries after his death his followers were condemned by the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 for views such as Christ being subordinate to the Father, universal salvation and the pre-existence of souls.

The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* suggested that the heresy charges may be why few originals of Origen's 6,000 known writings still exist. The newspaper said that an Italian scholar, Marina Molin Pradel, discovered the sermons in the Bavarian State Library in April while reading an 11th century Byzantine code. She noticed that some sermons were similar to a Latin translation of Origen's work. After further study, Pradel concluded that the manuscripts were by Origen.

Study: Belief in hell is associated with reduced crime

EUGENE, Oregon (LifeSiteNews.com) – "Religion" is still presumed by many to serve as a bulwark against unethical behaviours. But when it comes to predicting criminality, the specific religious beliefs one holds is the determining factor, says a University of Oregon psychologist.

A study appearing in the Public Library of Science journal *PLoS ONE*, has found that there is more criminal activity in societies in which people's religious beliefs contain little or no "punitive component" than in places where religious beliefs include the belief in divine punishment for crime (sin).

For example, a country where many more people believe in heaven than in hell is likely to have a much higher crime rate than one where people believe as strongly in hell as in heaven. The finding surfaced from a comprehensive analysis of 26 years of data involving 143,197 people in 67 countries.

"The key finding is that, controlling for each other, a nation's rate of belief in hell predicts lower crime rates, but the nation's rate of belief in heaven predicts higher crime rates, and these are strong effects," said Azim F. Shariff, professor of psychology and director of the Culture and Morality Lab at the University of Oregon.

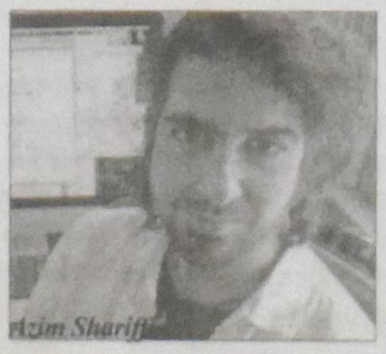
"I think it's an important clue about the differential effects of supernatural punishment and supernatural benevolence. The finding is consistent with controlled research we've done in the lab, but here shows a powerful 'real world' effect on something that really affects people: crime," said Shariff.

Answering to God makes fewer cheaters

Last year in the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Shariff reported that undergraduate students were more likely to cheat when they believe in a forgiving God than a punishing God.

"Supernatural punishment across nations seems to predict lower crime rates," Shariff said. "At this stage, we can only speculate about mechanisms, but it's possible that people who don't believe in the possibility of punishment in the afterlife feel like they can get away with unethical behaviour. There is less of a divine deterrent."

He added, however, that these are correlational data, and so caution should be taken with the conclusions. Though Shariff and study co-author Mijke Rhemtulla of the Center for Research Methods and Data Analysis at the University of Kansas tried to account for obvious alternative explanations, more research is needed to explore other interpretations of the findings.


Azim Shariff

The data for belief in hell and heaven, belief in God and religious attendance were culled from World Values and European Values surveys done across various time periods between 1981 and 2007. Crime data were pulled from United Nations records on homicide, robbery, rape, kidnapping, assault, theft, drug-related crimes, auto theft, burglary and human trafficking. Other factors accounted for included such things as nations' dominant religion – Roman Catholic, other Christian, Muslim – income inequality, life expectancy and incarceration rate. (In a 2003 study, Harvard University researchers Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary found that gross domestic product was higher in developed countries when people believed in hell more than they did in heaven.)

"This research provides new insights into the potential influences of cultural and religious beliefs on key outcomes at a societal level," said Kimberly Andrews Espy, vice president for research and innovation.

Although some people may see these findings as controversial, says Shariff, "dissecting the associations between specific belief systems and epidemiologic behaviours is an important first step for social scientists to disentangle the complex web of factors that motivate human behaviour."

Vatican announces 'culture and sport' office

Marian Van Til, *with files from LOR*

ROME – A month before the beginning of the Summer Olympics a Roman cardinal who is the president of Pope Benedict's Council for Culture announced the formation of a new Vatican office for "Culture and Sport." The new office will parallel the already existing Vatican office for "Church and Sport."

The purpose of the Culture and Sport office, said Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, will be "to gain a better understanding of the world of sports, with the goal of evangelization."

Ravasi said that the new initiative falls in line with his plans for a new Areopagus, a kind of "Court of the Gentiles" in which believers and non-believers can find common ground for dialogue. He concluded that sport is in need of a "catharsis against degeneration" so that it can return to being a culturally significant phenomenon.

Canadian bishop presses Saudis on religious tolerance

SAINT-HYACINTHE, Que. (CWN) – Roman Catholic Bishop François Lapierre of Saint-Hyacinthe, Que., has urged the Saudi Arabian government to disassociate itself from a sheikh's call to destroy all churches on the Arabian Peninsula. The bishop chairs the Human Rights Committee of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB).

In a recent letter to Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Canada, Bishop Lapierre wrote, "In a statement on March 12, 2012, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah, reputedly one of the most influential voices in the Islamic world, said that 'only one religion,' Islam, 'should exist in the Arabian Peninsula,' and thus 'it is necessary to destroy all churches in the region." Lapierre noted that "although this was widely circulated by news agencies more than two months ago, there have been no reports yet indicating that Saudi Arabian authorities have since corrected or denounced this call to religious violence."

The bishop continued, "We strongly urge you to express to His Royal Highness [King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud] our concerns about the statement by Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah, particularly in view of the urgent need for religious harmony and tolerance in the Middle East."

Columns

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis

God save the Queen

Just ahead of the celebration of the Queen's diamond jubilee last month, the *Toronto Star* had the bad judgement to publish an article by Bob Hepburn titled, "The Queen: three steps for Canada to replace the monarchy." He proposes a three-step process, the first of which would be a national referendum on this question: "Should Canada sever ties with the British monarchy?"

From the outset Hepburn demonstrates shaky understanding of our constitution, as revealed in this misleading question. This country's ties to the "British" monarchy were ended as long ago as 1931 with the *Statute of Westminster*. Since that time Canada has had its own Crown and at present shares the occupant of that office with 15 other Commonwealth Realms, including the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. We have no ties remaining with the *British* monarchy.

Nevertheless, let us for a moment follow Hepburn's proposal and see where it might take us. To alter the status of Canada's Queen would require the approval of both chambers of Parliament and all 10 provincial legislatures under section 41 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Thus far our attempts at constitutional change under this unanimity requirement have been spectacularly unsuccessful, as we experienced with the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords. A referendum on even a properly-worded question would probably not receive majority support in every province. A provincial government would be unwise to ignore the advice of the voters.

However, for our present purposes we shall assume that this unanimity is within reach. Then what? We would have to decide what to put in place of the monarchy. Perhaps a state presidency would replace the governor general's office. How then would the president attain his or her position? The Indian president is elected by the members of both parliamentary chambers and of the state legislatures. We could do the same, but it seems unlikely that Canadians would want to leave the selection of a new head of state in the hands of politicians, which does not differ much from how our current governor general is appointed.

The obvious democratic alternative would be to have the voters elect directly a new state president. However, a popularly-elected president would enjoy a democratic legitimacy that would effectively increase his or her power within the political system as a whole. This could give Canada a constitution similar to that of the French Fifth Republic in which executive power is shared – and sometimes contested – by president and prime minister. Might our new president take initiatives against the advice of the government of the day? In the absence of explicit constitutional constraints on the office, this is a distinct possibility.

American territory?

We could, of course, abolish the office of prime minister altogether and have only an elected president, who would be responsible directly to the people rather than to parliament. Obviously this would take us into American territory. The United States has functioned quite well for 225 years with a separation of powers between president and congress. But Canada is not the United States. Our political traditions have developed differently in accordance with the central constitutional principle of responsible government. Under responsible government the prime minister and cabinet must retain the confidence of the House of Commons in order to keep governing. To abandon this principle, with all of its attendant usages and customs, would not be wise at this late stage.

Along with 15 other Commonwealth Realms, Canada celebrates the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II this year.

More significant, however, is the fact that prime ministerial and royal functions really are different and require different offices. Nearly four years ago in this space, I observed that Americans had elected Barack Obama because of his kingly qualities and his promises to seek consensus and unify the nation. Since then, however, Obama, in typical prime ministerial fashion, has pursued divisive policies which, among other things, threaten the religious freedom of faith-based institutions.

Unlike Americans, we in Canada already enjoy a political system that quite sensibly separates these two executive functions into distinct offices. Our constitutional monarchy has served us very well for centuries, and we have every reason to celebrate it rather than to entertain ill-considered proposals for its abolition.

David T. Koyzis (dkoyzis@redeemer.ca) teaches politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont., and has recently completed a book manuscript on authority, office and the image of God.

Technically Speaking

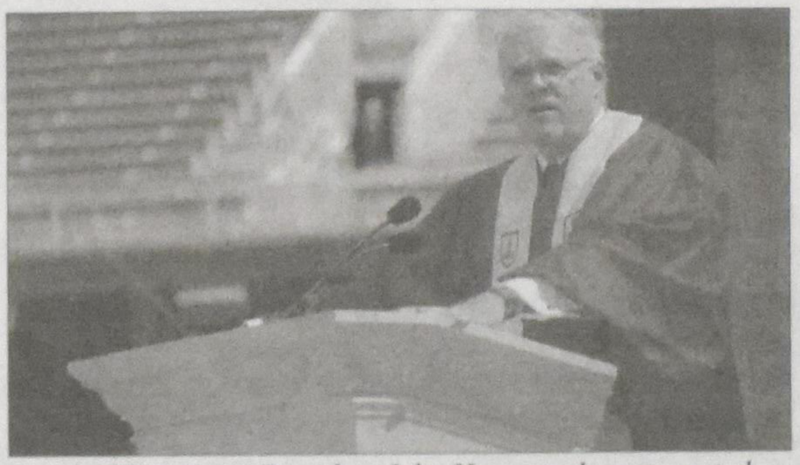
Derek Schuurman

How will technology change higher education?

The format of the lecture, which has been a staple of higher education for thousands of years, is finally being challenged by new technology. The web has fundamentally disrupted newspapers, publishing and music companies, but has not yet done much in higher education. But if recent reports are true, this is about to change. Many elite universities now see online delivery as a strategic part of their futures. A recent article in the *New Yorker* described John Hennessy (engineering professor, technology entrepreneur and now president of Stanford University) as suggesting that online learning can be as revolutionary to education as digital downloads were to the music business. With regards to changes in higher education, in the words of Hennessy, "There's a tsunami coming."

Higher education has seen little change over the centuries. Plato's academy in 350 BC was formed in a time when knowledge was primarily passed orally. The approach of oral delivery continued over centuries, even after the invention of the printing press. The 20th century brought even more possibilities with the development of audio and video media and recording technologies. But the lecture has persisted as the primary means of teaching in higher education. Even amid the recent explosion of the web and communications technologies, the lecture still remains the preferred mode of delivery. But if the president of Stanford University is correct, big changes may soon be coming in higher education.

Large lecture halls filled with rows of seats could give way to web content delivery that students can individually access or review at any time. Digital media can be used to provide interactive learning, tailored to a student's preferred schedule and pace. Some respected universities such as Harvard, Berkeley and MIT have gone so far as to offer free online courses (for example, see http://ocw.mit.edu). As of February 2012, MIT published 2,745 courses freely online. The Khan Academy, a non-profit organization with the stated mission of "providing a free world-class education to anyone, anywhere" has an online collection of more than 3,200 video lectures and tutorials in a wide variety of subjects. The web can bring increased efficiencies in the delivery of education.



Stanford University President John Hennessy has suggested that online learning can revolutionize higher education.

Threats and opportunities

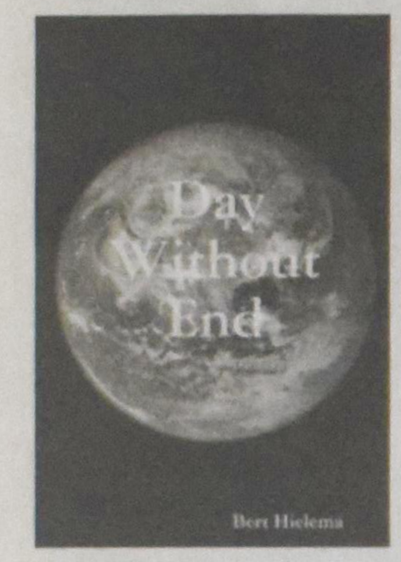
But do greater efficiencies still result in a good education? How important is face-to-face interaction? Will the medium of the web change the message of education? If higher education is primarily about information distribution, then the university will certainly be subject to the same changes that have shaken the publishing and music industries. However, Christian higher education should be about more than information distribution – it should be about shaping people in genuine community. The coming tsunami brings both threats and opportunities.

Christian higher education has, up till now, been associated with residential campuses where students stay in college dorms and generally attend traditional lectures over a 4-year course of study. This style of education fosters community, provides opportunities for cultivating relationships, allows for spiritual formation and helps shape character. One significant challenge to such a model is cost: many students simply cannot afford the high tuition costs. Another challenge is accessibility: most of the majority world, including Christians in developing nations, have no access to quality Christian higher education. Perhaps Christian colleges might consider using online content delivery to disseminate some of their materials to the wider world for free. Doing so would provide an opportunity to share Christian content with many who could never otherwise afford Christian higher education.

As the "tsunami" arrives in higher education, Christian colleges will need to identify the non-negotiables that we must hold on to. What things can we change and what things ought we to safeguard? What are the new opportunities and how can we blend the best of the old and new? Leaders in Christian higher education will need to discern how to face this coming tsunami, while remaining faithful to their core values and distinctive identity. What are the implications of "semper reformanda" (the notion of "always reforming") in Christian higher education? Leaders in Reformed Christian higher education are facing a changing landscape, and will need to chart a course that keeps our institutions current while staying true to their reformed moorings and institutional missions.

Dr. Derek Schuurman (dschuur@cs.redeemer.ca) is a computer science professor at Redeemer University College. His interests include cover diverse areas such as computer vision, faith and technology, and Christian higher education.

Reviews



Day Without End
by Bert Hielema
lulu.com/spotlight/bhielema

Trees, truth and triumph

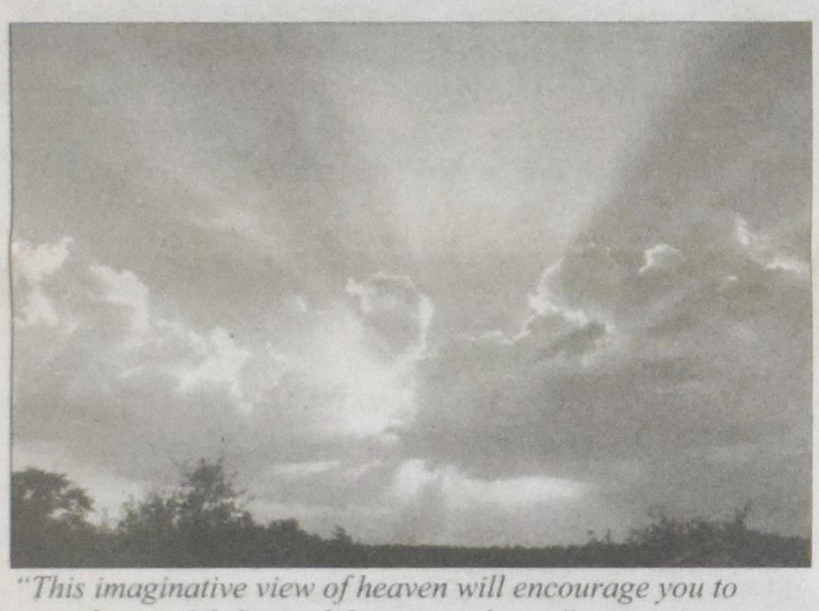
Brenda Visser

Time travellers, meat-like fruit and the intermind are things that readers will encounter in Bert Hielema's *Day Without End*. This imaginative view of heaven will encourage you to consider our life beyond the one we know. Weaving in characters from across time and culture, including animals and plants, Hielema gives the reader food for thought.

The jacket of the book says that this is a response to a book entitled *The World Without Us*. While I haven't read that book, a quick online search will show that Hielema's book is indeed a much more positive and hopeful contrast.

And this is the strength of *Day Without End*. Full of imagination and vivid imagery, the reader is transported to a different place and can see, hear and feel the new world. Hielema conveys a palpable sense of wonderment; brightness and beauty abound. "Eager are my eyes to embrace the excellence of my creator" (7).

The variety of characters woven from across time is enjoyable and refreshing. From Biblical characters, to historical figures such as Bach and Handel, to representatives from many cultures across the globe, the Gospel of Jesus Christ for every tribe and nation and language is evident. Intriguing and sometimes humourous, the conversations between the main character, Novissimus, and Jethro, the father of Moses, for example, or with Arctica, a woman from Canada's Far North, are thought provoking. The names of the characters are well chosen, descriptive and add an extra richness to the story.



"This imaginative view of heaven will encourage you to consider our life beyond the one we know."

Interwoven throughout are stimulating ideas of what the new earth might be like. And this is where some readers might find a challenge. Trees that communicate, carnivores eating fruit, mind-reading and a comfortable casualness with Jesus are some such ideas.

The idea of continuing growth towards perfection is one that challenged me. Hielema stretches the idea of attained perfection the moment we reach heaven to suggest that perhaps perfection is a process, not an outcome. Jesus says to Novissimus, Arctica and Initia, "Now our real work starts and it's going to be fun. You will cherish the challenge and live every moment of it"(83). Perhaps, since part of our Genesis mandate was to work, Hielema is suggesting that work itself is redeemed.

An obvious theme of the book is that salvation has already been obtained through Jesus Christ, but other questions are raised that would be good to explore in a group. For example, what do passages such as 1 Corinthians 13:12 mean in the context of the new earth: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known"? What are the implications for life on the new earth? Are heaven and the new earth the same thing?

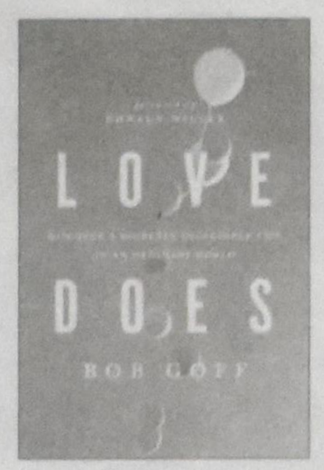
Despite all the good qualities of the book, I felt it lagged a bit. A good story most often contains conflict – between man and nature, or man versus self, for example. This struggle or tension is missing, and unfortunately made the story fall flat for me. With the victory over death and sin already won in Jesus in this heavenly setting, I think it would be hard for any writer to come up with a suitable challenge that our imperfected minds could grasp and resonate with.

And despite the fact that the reader enters a new, vibrant world in this book, they might find it a bit incongruous to read about computer-like technology and pipe organs, as I did. Also out of place were the unfortunate typesetting errors that sometimes come with self-publishing. This is a regrettable detractor, and one that Hielema likely had little control over.

Not likely to become a best-seller as *The World Without Us* did, *Day Without End* still holds a place to stimulate discussion and to lead readers to ponder the Word of God more closely. It encourages us to respect creation in all its forms. I give Hielema credit for his valiant work to capture a view of the new earth in a way that our finite minds can understand.

Brenda Visser (brenda.visser@ripnet.com) was recently shortlisted in the "Article-Blog Series" category in the Word Guild's Canadian Christian Writing Awards. See **brendavisser.wordpress.com** *for more of her writing.*

Stories of spontaneous extravagance

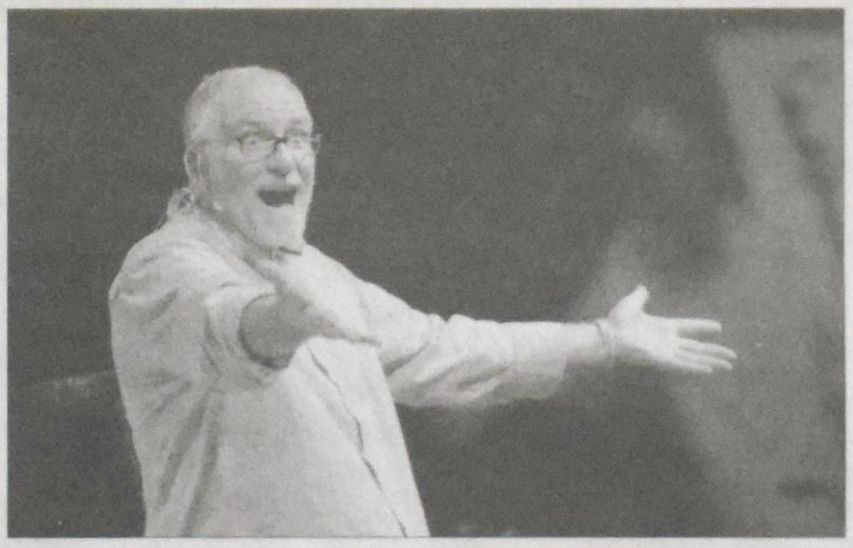


Love Does
by Bob Goff
Thomas Nelson Publishers
Nashville, TN, 2012

Nick Schuurman

Bob Goff is, in many ways, a larger than life personality. It will only take one of the many stories in his memoir, *Love Does*, to convince you of that. Take, for example, what happened following high school. While he was a good student, Goff admits he was also a lazy one, and so when it came time to apply for post-secondary education, his options were limited; he ended up studying something he was not at all passionate about. And then he decided he wanted to go to law school. Having scored embarrassingly low on the qualifying tests, and later received numerous rejection notices, he decided to go to a school's dean himself and try to persuade the man to enroll him. Initially brushed off, he makes up his mind to sit in front of the university office until he is admitted into the program. After seven days, the dean finally relents, and Goff, despite being initially rejected and the fact that he lacked the necessary academic qualifications, is told to go get his textbooks.

The book was co-written by Donald Miller, whose help in putting the stories together is evident. *Love Does* follows a similar pattern to that of Miller's own books (*Blue Like Jazz* and *Searching for God Knows What* among others), featuring short, narrative-driven chapters that speak of Goff's personal experience. Each story is followed by a brief spiritual takeaway ("God is like this ..." or "A life of faith is like this ..."), all of which are genuine enough, but sometimes come across as somewhat forced. In one chapter, for example, Goff recalls a major car crash in which he managed to survive, while his vehicle was totaled. His conclusion: we need to ooze out God, in the same way that fluids spilled from his wrecked Jeep. While the principle may, in one sense, be true and admirable enough, I imagine a lot of folks might roll their eyes or cringe – not only because it comes across as forced, but because, while every part of the human experience is spiritual, not every event has a neat little devotional at its end. By the end of the book, the reader can pretty much predict what his concluding thoughts are going to be, based on his experiences.



There is another thing about his accounts that may cause some discomfort (or disgust), depending on the reader's experience and disposition, and that is the fact of Goff's affluence. He does not hide the fact that, because of the nature of his career, he is quite wealthy. In one of the chapters, he describes persuading his family to allow him to purchase a piece of art that he saw and loved, and how it would end up costing him more than he spent on his first four cars combined. That he was willing to pursue something he was passionate about, and willing to spend lavishly to get it is indeed admirable in one sense. We far too often end up tip-toeing through life, being concerned primarily with safety and security. And yet, one cannot help but ask how much of the life of whimsy and spontaneity Goff encourages is afforded simply because of the balance of his savings account. Not all of us, after all, can afford to fly our children around the earth several times over to visit some of the world's most powerful leaders (which Goff does, and recalls, in one of the book's most moving chapters). For a readership in any way familiar with the immigrant experience or the struggle to settle in Canada, such acts of extravagance may seem somewhat foreign.

I really had to check my heart reading this book. I am still not sure exactly what it is about Goff's wealth and spontaneous acts of extravagance that caused me discomfort. That said, I lent my copy out already, which is a testament to the fact that, despite its difficulties, I believe it is something worth reading. When I handed the bright blue book to my friend, I told him, "It will make you want to do things." I have always held a deep sense of respect for individuals who simply do things, who take risks to live a life of purpose and passion. Whether it takes you with the author to Uganda to work to liberate children from brutal oppression, or somewhere else entirely, like standing behind a pulpit or in front of a classroom, love, Goff insists, does.

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is CC's reviews editor.

Features

Reclaim *Family Game Night* this summer

Natasha Moes

"You roll the dice, you move your mice!"

"Girl: I won.
Boy: Where?
Girl: There, diagonally.
Boy: Pretty sneaky, sis!"

"Take out the spare rib for 100 dollars...."

If you remember these quotes from board game TV commercials (*Mouse Trap*, *Connect Four* and *Operation*, to be specific) you may also remember evenings of family board games around the kitchen table. In this current era of individual play on gaming consoles, it might seem as though the tradition of family game night has been lost. In our busy culture, it's a rarity for families to sit down and play a game together, but this is changing for families who have been introduced to a new class of board games catching on in North America. Paul and Abby Paterson recount their introduction to European-style board games and how those games led to a new business, a ministry opportunity and countless hours around the dining room table with friends and family.

"It all started with a friend of Paul's around 2002, who played a whole lot of these games and taught us a few," recounts Abby. "We began buying copies of the games we liked and introduced them to people in our church community. It was a great way to spend time with people, especially when our kids were young, and was an inexpensive way to hang out with friends."

Euro-style board games

The games she refers to are German-style board games, often referred to as Euro-style, and are a broad class of tabletop games. BoardGameGeek (**boardgamegeek.com**) characterizes Euro-style games as having fairly simple rules, short to medium playing times and indirect conflict between players such as competing over resources or vying for points. These games emphasize strategy over luck, generally feature economic themes rather than military and rarely include elimination of players. In the mid-1990s, *Settlers of Catan* was one of the first games to become widely popular outside of Europe and brought attention to Euro-style games as a whole. Since then, games like *Carcassone*, *Puerto Rico* and *Ticket to Ride*, among others, have also become popular in North America.

As the Patersons began introducing friends to Euro-style games, they found that Canadian retailers didn't carry many of the games they were interested in. Paul and Abby began ordering games through online retailers and often friends and family would order games through them in order to save on shipping. With huge deliveries of games frequently arriving at their house, Paul and Abby saw a business opportunity. "We had been looking for a way for me to be home with the kids instead of working outside of the home. Since we were ordering games so often anyway, we thought, 'Why not sell games?' From there, it really took off since there really aren't other game retailers in the area," says Abby. They decided to start as an online store, with an option for local customers to pick up orders at their Mississauga home.

They named the store Fun Games Café with dreams of someday growing into a brick-and-mortar business where people can come for a snack or meal and enjoy games together. While having a café isn't in their immediate

Sofia and Devin Paterson show off some of their favourite games, Kinder Bunnies and Wasabi.

plans, it is still something they would be interested in doing. "I have always loved hosting people and making great food for them, so having a café is still something I think about from time to time," says Abby. Their online business has grown over the past several years and is Canada's leading e-tailer of boardgames for all ages and skill levels. They carry more than 750 titles from *Dutch Blitz* to complex "gamers' games" that take an entire day to play.

The Patersons believe that Euro-style games are a leisure activity and form of play that appeal to a unique audience. "Just about anyone can learn to play most of these games, but we've found that the audience that seems to enjoy them the most are people who are into science or technology, who might be kind of 'geeky'… there's a reason that TV's *Big Bang Theory* characters are always playing strategy games," says Abby. Paul adds, "Games are a great way to spend time with people who have similar interests. You get to relax and enjoy being with people." In the same way that some people enjoy recreational sports leagues as a leisure pastime, gamers form leagues and clubs to play certain games. Tournaments are held in major cities throughout Europe and North America for some of the more popular Euro-games like *Settlers of Catan*, drawing thousands of competitors and spectators.

As Euro-style games became popular in their church community (Meadowvale CRC) nearly 10 years ago, the Patersons saw an opportunity to spend time in fellowship by teaching and learning new games with families at church. They hosted regular gaming parties in their home and continued to introduce people to new games, which also helped to build their business. Families enjoyed the variety of games that the Patersons were familiar with and parents were excited to find games that they could play with their children. Often, kids are able to learn Euro-style games quickly because of the simple rules and straightforward game play. In addition, because most cost less than $50, investing in a few different games won't break the bank.

Games and ministry opportunities

The Patersons began to host a monthly Games Night at the church on the first Sunday of the month and brought their game collection for the church community to use, while serving a casual potluck-style dinner. Because many of the games can be played by young children and adults, it was not unusual to see seniors setting up games with elementary school-aged kids and enjoying some friendly competition. Gradually, people in the wider gaming community learned about the Games Nights through advertising on the Fun Games Café website or by word of mouth from other gamers. They began attending consistently, often coming on public transportation from all around the GTA or even further.

"Over time, the group of people coming to Games Night has shifted. When we started it, mainly people from our church were coming, and we saw it as a fellowship time. Now, we have 60-70 people coming every month, and most aren't involved with a church at all," explains Abby. Paul continues, "We've had people hesitate to come because it is held in a church and their experiences with church or Christians haven't been positive, but it has been really cool to see them choose to come anyway. They know we're Christians, and they often ask about the artwork in the sanctuary." Some local gamers have even joined in other activities at Meadowvale CRC such as women's retreats and discussion groups, and others have said that being inside a church makes them interested in exploring their own spirituality.

Board games are a valuable form of play and have benefits aside from simply enjoying time with family and friends. Board games allow players to exercise important life skills. An article from the BBC recently highlighted the benefits of board game play for children to practice patience, good sportsmanship, planning and strategizing and handling losses with dignity. These skills are transferrable to all areas of life. Having the freedom to develop them in the low-stakes context of a board game serves children well as they face bigger challenges. Studies indicate that being able to sit down and play an entire board game can also foster the ability to focus and help lengthen attention spans. On top of all this, playing games allows people of all ages to set aside distractions and interact with each other. In a culture where many people spend more time in front of a screen than in face-to-face conversation, time spent in community, whether with family members or strangers, can be a welcome break from the technology we've become so attached to. All these benefits make it easy to see why Fun Games Café has seen so much success and why so many people have made it a priority to visit Games Night each month.

If you're interested in trying out some Euro-style games, the Patersons and their children, Devin and Sofia, recommend the following favourite games for families.

Paul: *Settlers of Catan*, *Dominion*, *Carcassone*
Abby: *Dixit*, *Quirkle*, *Gift Trap*
Devin: *Wasabi*
Sofia: *Kinder Bunnies*

Visit them online at **fungamescafe.com** and check their online news for directions to the monthly Games Night held at Meadowvale CRC in Mississauga on the first Sunday of every month.

Natasha Moes is a graduate of the University of Waterloo and works in Mississauga.

'Write with purpose and joy' is the message at WRITE! CANADA 2012

Linda Jonasson

Sheila Wray Gregoire's speech keeps me riveted to my chair. Blessed with a brilliant smile and sunny disposition, Sheila explains how she stumbled into writing. When her infant son was in I.C.U. several years ago, she overheard a nurse relate a humorous story to her co-worker. Sheila sold the story as a joke to *Reader's Digest* for $200. While I am saddened to hear that her son passed away, I am amazed at her composure and heartened to hear about her subsequent writing success. She has published four books including her first, *To Love, Honor and Vacuum*, and her most recent, *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex*. Sheila says that "Our culture is calling out for authenticity," a common theme throughout her books; we can't be something we're not. "We need to connect with our readers," Sheila says. "C.S. Lewis answered every letter he ever received." She explains further, "[While] the writer starts the book, the reader finishes it."

Later, when I'm washing my hands in the washroom, a first-time conference participant says to me: "I already feel like I've gotten my money's worth." That is the consensus at **Write! Canada 2012**, a Christian Writers' Conference held June 14 to 16 at Guelph Bible Conference Centre, where many of the 200 participants are repeat customers, hailing from Ontario, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, California and Texas.

Our second speaker is Jean Little, a grey-haired lady with a warm smile. She is the author of 50 children's books and recipient of the Governor General's Award for literature. Words of wisdom flow from her mouth as her seeing-eye dog rests at her feet. The 80-year-old, a natural storyteller, relates how she wrote a poem as a teen, submitted it to the local newspaper contest and won first prize. Later she was thrilled to read a letter to the editor praising her poem (written anonymously by her father). With her $30 prize money, she bought green velvet and her mother made her a dress which she wore to a dance. She and her father won first prize in the waltz contest.

What are the keys to being a good writer according to Jean? Read a lot, write a lot, observe yourself, show rather than tell, and work hard. She rewrote the first chapter of *Kate* 25 times.

I close my laptop and head to my continuing class, one of six sessions with Elma Schemenauer. The author of 80 books, Elma imparts her wisdom. She gives us a list of children's writing opportunities, including curriculum documents, e-books and apps. We discuss our ongoing projects with our classmates: one lady is pondering a story about a red-tailed black squirrel inhabiting her backyard; another had her short story published in an anthology. Connecting with fellow writers is invaluable.

At the bookstore, a plethora of books awaits our perusal: novels, how-to writing books, children's books, non-fiction books. As I browse, I meet energetic first-timer, Laura Bokma, from Nova Scotia who won the "God Uses Ink" contest with her poem, gaining her free registration at **Write! Canada**. She gives me a copy of the poem.

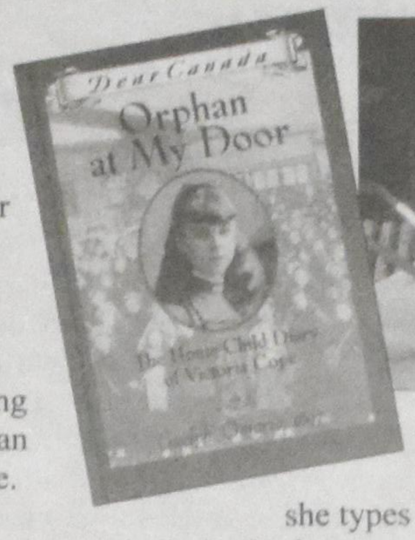
Six million questions about God

Back at the chapel, I listen to our third speaker, Thomas Umstadtt, a young Texan with a winsome smile, sans Southern drawl. Thomas, a technological wizard, begins his power point presentation with a photo of his mother. She grew up in the pre-computer age and used to rely heavily on Thomas for technological support. I can relate! If I have computer problems, I ask *my* son Thomas for help. He points out that while most technological questions can be answered on Google, it is also the forum for six million questions about God. Christians need to use social media and be ready to respond to these queries. Thomas attended college with a Cambodian refugee who was never able to escape the terror of the killing fields, constantly living in fear, until he came to Christ by purchasing a Bible on Amazon.

Occasionally, I share a one-on-one session with a faculty member. I discuss my children's book query letter (a letter to an editor pitching a story idea) with Elma Schemenauer. Children's author Marla Stewart Konrad critiques my book manuscript *I'm Just a Home Child*. And Larry Willard, publisher of Castle Quay books, answers my question: "How can I edit my 2800-word children's book?" He suggests I divide my story into 10 key scenes and narrow each of those scenes down to a 25-word blurb.

Outside, I lounge in a Muskoka chair under the mature maples, absorbing everything I've learned. My musings are interrupted by the dinner bell and I head to the dining hall. Mealtime gives us the opportunity to "schmooze" with the best and brightest in the writing world. I converse with Johanne Robertson, editor of *Maranatha News*, who gave me my big break last year by publishing my British Home Child article.

Some schmoozing opportunities are unplanned. I pass Jean Little in the bookstore sitting at a table stacked high with her books. She looks a bit lonely, and I ask her if she wants company. She does! We chat a bit about her family. I ask her how she writes, given that she is legally blind.



She uses a computer which audibly identifies each letter as she types it. We also discuss her books, particularly *Orphan at my Door*, a children's chapter book about a British Home Child. I mention that my picture book is also about a home child, my great-grandma. Later, she gives me the name of her editor at Scholastic!

'The word is very near you'

Our final speaker, Thomas Froese, is a soft-spoken man with a tall, slender build and big blue eyes. Thomas, author of *Ninety-Nine Windows*, chronicles his experiences as a newspaper reporter in the Muslim countries of Yemen and Uganda and using the opportunity to evangelize. He also recalls the young evangelist from Nova Scotia who was suspended from high school for wearing an "offensive" t-shirt that said "Life is WASTED without Jesus." What is Thomas's response? "Of course Christianity is offensive; the cross is offensive." We are all "starving beggars," says Thomas, and we all need to be "adopted into God's family." He talks about his previously broken relationship with his father and how he saw an opportunity upon his father's 80th birthday to mend their relationship by writing an article for the *Hamilton Spectator* (Aug. 27, 2011). Thomas says we need to get the Truth out there. "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it" (Deuteronomy 30:14).

Prior to the conference, The Word Guild, the sponsor of **Write! Canada**, hosted an awards gala in Mississauga. The highlight of the night was the presentation of the annual Leslie K. Tarr Award, named to honour pastor, teacher, journalist and editor, Leslie K. Tarr, who contributed greatly to Canadian and Christian writing. Hugh Cook, Professor Emeritus at Redeemer University College, author of *Home in Alfalfa* and *Heron River*, won this award in 1997. This year's winner was author, theologian and humanitarian, Jean Vanier, son of former Governor-General Georges P. Vanier, and author of more than 30 books including *Becoming Human* (1999). All of these authors and speakers inspire me!

The Word is powerful. The power of the pen is awesome. Take out that pen. Open that laptop. Write the Word. Write with purpose and joy. That is the message of **Write! Canada**.

For more information, visit ***writecanada.org***.

Linda Jonasson is an elementary school teacher and writer. She lives with her family in Brantford, Ont. and attends Hope CRC. She blogs at ***alinefromLinda.blogspot.com***.

Peaceful setting at Guelph Bible Conference Centre.

Weeding out worry

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Years ago, when I tucked my son Jason into bed after we had watched a school play, he concluded his prayer, "God, please be with the kids who will be in next year's play so that they don't get really nervous, too." Knowing how stage fright affected him, he worried that it would also plague them. No sooner had this worry of his been set aside, another claimed its spot.

As I listened, I smiled, pleased to note his caring nature. After all, that's what Christian parents want to see in their children. Of course! However, we don't want them to worry. When they do, we embrace them and tell them everything will work out all right.

Yet we worry ourselves.

During my second pregnancy, my sister gave birth to a baby who had no arms. I began to worry in earnest that my baby would also have a birth defect. When my four-month-old daughter was hospitalized with croup, I worried she would die. When my son cried every night because he didn't like Grade 1, I worried! Would he be able to adapt to his new setting?

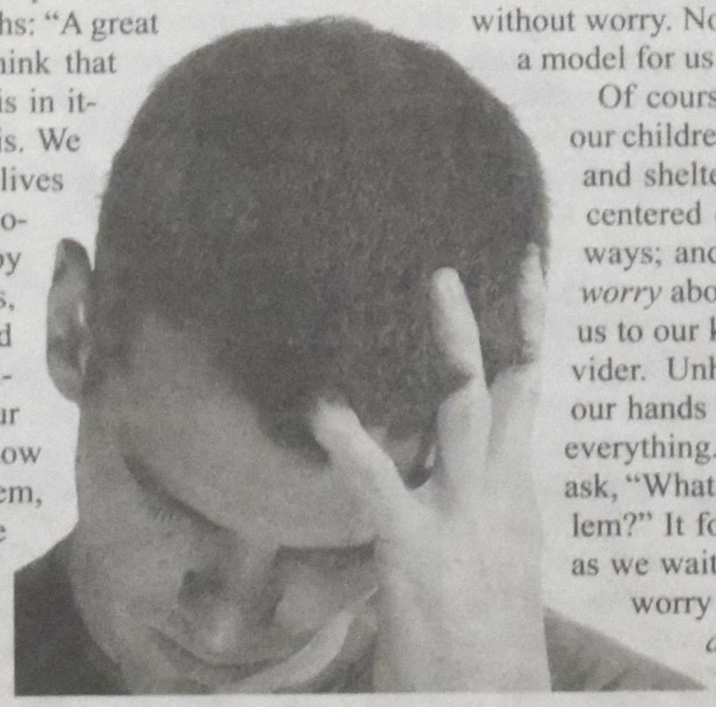
During the high school years, many more worries occupied my mind. When my daughter injured her knee in a soccer game, I worried about whether it would heal properly. When my son refused to go on a class trip, I worried about his rebellious spirit. I also wrestled with generalized worries that became giants as I lay awake at night staring into the darkness. Would my children choose positive friends? Would they abstain from drinking underage? Would they make wise choices in terms of their sexuality? Would they handle their finances well so they could pay for post-secondary education?

When my kids went to university, there were no fewer things to worry about. Would they be faithful to the Lord? Would they be able to discern the secular spirits that influence culture? Would they find marriage partners who love Jesus? Would they find meaningful employment characterized by service to God?

Looking back, I realize I'm just like my son who discarded one worry to be immediately replaced by another. But isn't worrying about our kids the most natural thing for loving parents to do? Is it wrong to worry about them?

Jesus didn't mince words when it came to this topic: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear…. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt. 6:25, 34). His words are a command, not a request. That's how serious an issue it is.

So, if worrying is wrong, why do we still worry about our kids? C. S. Lewis answers that question in a letter to his friend Dom Bede Griffiths: "A great many people do now seem to think that the mere state of being *worried* is in itself meritorious. I don't think it is. We must, if it so happens, give our lives for others: but even while we're doing it, I think we're meant to enjoy Our Lord and, in Him, our friends, our food, our sleep, our jokes, and the birds' song and the frosty sunrise." We mistakenly think that our "meritorious" worrying will show our kids how much we love them, and reveal to God that we're awake on the job and that we'll keep things under control on the home front. However, that's not the kind of parenting God wants – worry-weeds choking out the beautiful gardens he intends our families to be.



'Worry' defined

If we, as Christian parents, are serious about obeying our Lord and defeating worry, we need to understand what it is. What is worry, anyway? In *Come Thirsty*, Max Lucado writes, "*Worry* comes from the Greek word that means 'to divide the mind.' Anxiety splits us right down the middle, creating a double-minded thinker.... Perception is divided, distorting your vision. Strength is divided, wasting your energy." When I begin to worry, I think of my own anagrammatic definition:

Worry is **work** – nonproductive work. Not the kind of work that keeps clothes clean, teaches children to read, makes meals, builds houses, or creates works of art. Rather, it is a crushing drudgery that produces nothing, yet exacts a huge toll.

Worry is the feeling that life is **out of control**. It is an obsession with outcomes, motivated by the determination to bring circumstances under our control.

Worry is **refusing to trust** in God's sovereignty, an unwillingness to believe that he is King of our lives.

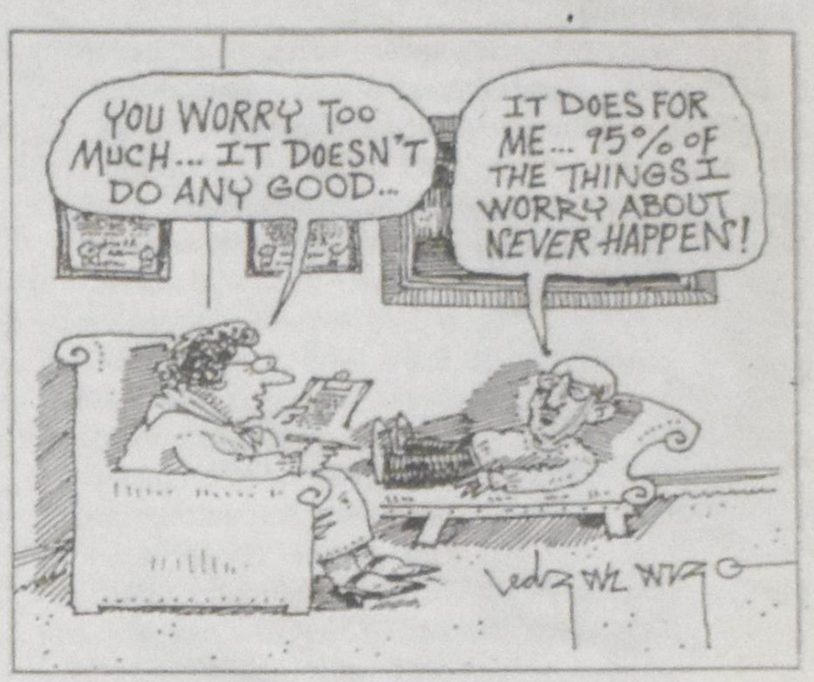
Worry is **repetitive**. As soon as we finish worrying about one thing, another worry creeps in.

Worry is a **yoke of bondage** that harnesses our thoughts, spirits and actions to fear instead of to freedom in Christ.

If worry is all these negative things, who needs it anyway? It's no wonder Jesus commanded his children, including Christian parents, not to worry. But we know that's easier said than done. Who of us can claim to be the expert on not worrying? I know I can't. But we can help each other along on the parenting journey, sharing how the Lord has helped us to defeat worry. Here are some of the things that I've found helpful.

Be aware of the difference between healthy concern for your children and unhealthy worrying about them. In the *Africa Bible Commentary*, Joe Kapolyo explains the difference we find between the two in Matthew 6:26: "The birds of the air work very hard to provide for their offspring. Yet they are not consumed by worry over what they will feed their young. The God who provides for them is the disciples' heavenly father. He will provide for his own just as he provides for the birds." How true. Many times I have watched the sparrows feed their young in the birdhouse that hangs from our walnut tree. The baldheaded babies, squalling for food, peek out of the hole. Both the mother and father return at regular intervals with food. I am amazed at their tireless dedication, reflecting the efforts of all God's creatures to care for their offspring. Like us, yet without worry. No wonder Jesus points to birds as a model for us to emulate.

Of course, we must be concerned about our children. We must provide food, clothes and shelter for them; give them a Christ-centered education; guide them in God's ways; and much more – but we must not *worry* about them. Healthy concern brings us to our knees before God, our great provider. Unhealthy worry makes us wring our hands as if we have to be in charge of everything. Healthy concern prompts us to ask, "What else can we do to solve the problem?" It focuses our thoughts on solutions as we wait for God to guide us. Unhealthy worry causes us to wonder if there are *any* solutions, and focuses our attention on the problem in-



stead of on God who "knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:8b). That's the fundamental difference between concern and worry.

Realize that, no matter what happens, God will give you strength. C. S. Lewis conveyed this same encouragement in another letter: "Remember one is given strength to bear what happens to one, but not the 101 different things that *might* happen." God does not give us strength for things that are not reality or that are only a figment of our fearful imaginations. We need to take hold of him in such a way that when we have genuine concerns – a seriously ill child, no food or clothes for our kids, or a rebellious teenager – they don't morph into disobedient worrying. Receiving God's strength entails praying for his help and reading the Bible where the command "Do not be afraid!" is repeated many times for a people prone to worry. We need to take time to be with God. When we do so, we acknowledge that our own internal pep talks won't help us overcome worry. Our rationalizations won't do any good either. Our frenzied attempts to place life under our control will accomplish even less. Only by being connected to God, the Source of all power, can we defeat worry, and proclaim in the words of *O Worship the King*: "Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail, in you do we trust, nor find you to fail. Your mercies, how tender, how firm to the end, our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!"

'Worry is infidelity'

Read books or articles to learn what others can teach you about overcoming worrying. No other writer has challenged me more to confront my propensity to worry than Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest*. At times I have cringed at his severity. Yet, the longer I have thought about his words, the deeper my understanding has grown. Here's just one of the things he says about worrying: "Don't take the pressure of forethought upon yourself. It is not only wrong to worry, it is infidelity, because worrying means that we do not think that God can look after the practical details of our lives, and it is never anything else that worries us. Have you ever noticed what Jesus said would choke the word He puts in? The devil? No, the cares of this world.... I will not trust where I will not see, that is where infidelity begins. The only cure for infidelity is obedience to the Spirit."

When I first read those words, I thought, *What do you mean when you say worrying is infidelity? I love God. I trust him. Of course, now that you mention it, there are a few things I'd like to be in control of, like changing my daughter's belligerent attitude, or knowing what's going to happen in my son's relationship with his girlfriend....* However, as the Holy Spirit confronted me about how I worried about my children, I began to understand that God

Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

A letter to my daughter

Dear Stephanie,

Few moments in my life stand out like the one when the doctor told me I was carrying twins. Inexperienced with children, the idea of looking after one infant terrified me. I didn't have a motherly bone in my body. Imagine the shock when I learned there were two children within my womb!

They stuck me in an ambulance along with a delirious old man. The attendant apologized profusely for his rambling outbursts. But I was nearly giddy with the news I'd just received. I giggled uncontrollably at the thought that God would entrust two babies to my care. "Oh Lord," I prayed, "I sure hope you know what you're doing, because I haven't got a clue." Then I realized he already knew that. I spent the duration of the trip to London praying for your safe arrival and good health. I thanked God for modern medicine and technology, and reminded myself that he would equip me for the challenges ahead.

You arrived one minute after James, at 8:13 a.m. on your grandma's 50th birthday. Your daddy got to hold you for a minute before they whisked you away to the Neo-Natal unit, standard protocol for babies less than six pounds.

Later they wheeled me over to the NICU. I donned gown, gloves and mask before entering a world of whispering respirators and bleating monitors. And there you were – at five and a half pounds – a giant among all the other "preemies."

They had shaved a patch of your peach fuzz hair to insert an IV pick into your head. Your wee hands were wrapped in gauze to prevent you from getting those matchstick fingers tangled into the tubing. You lay, tiny and exquisite under the heat lamp. I loved you with depths of my heart that I didn't even know existed until that moment.

You grew quickly and learned to walk at nine months. It was more like running, actually, and you didn't really master stopping until somewhere around 11 months. Unlike James, you had little time for cuddles, wanting always to explore every nook and cranny, climbing into cupboards, boxes and the clothes dryer. You conducted experiments on the buoyancy of dog kibbles in the water dish and the solvency of newsprint when tossed into the open lid of a washing machine.

You left your dental impression on every chair in the house, and discovered how to turn food that you didn't like into a pulp that could easily be hidden in your cheeks until you could spit out the wad and offer it to the family dog. But who could get angry at a child who smiled so readily at anyone who looked into those vivacious blue eyes?

While my maternal instincts had to be developed, you were a natural born mother. You cared for James (whether he wanted it or not), your dolls and any furry critter that crossed your path. When Jess was born, you followed me around, looking for ways to help and imitating anything I did.

One morning I got out of bed and limped across the bedroom floor on tired, aching feet. I turned to see my little girl, right behind me in her pink nightgown, limping just like me, wincing with every step. And I realized I had better choose my path carefully, figuratively and literally, since I had someone so innocent and trusting looking up to me.

People say we look alike, but I've always thought that's unfair to you. You are uniquely lovely. We do share many of the same strengths and weaknesses, not to mention similar tastes in cars, handbags and clothing. But you possess integrity, courage and determination that I can only admire.

Stephanie VanderSlikke and Aaron Smith were married on June 22.

You grew into a strong young woman – embracing life, love and all the opportunities that came your way. Your God-given compassion for others and the gift to encourage and support made social work your obvious calling.

Somewhere along the line I found in you a kindred spirit, a good friend as well as a cherished daughter. When you went to college for the first time you left on Monday and came home for the weekend on Friday. We sat on the front porch well after midnight, talking and laughing as if you had been gone for months.

And now, here you are, about to trade in the VanderSlikke moniker for the simple elegance of Smith. God has brought you and Aaron together as best friends and soul mates, and on Friday you will become husband and wife. As you move into this next chapter of life, may you continue to discover new things about yourselves and each other, including extraordinary places of the heart. I know God is with you.

I love you.

With all my heart,
Mom

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

Worry

...continued from p. 12

is offended when I worry. My worry says that his love, strength, wisdom, comfort, justice and compassion aren't sufficient to take care of my children's needs.

I began to imagine a scenario like this: I am diligently caring for my five young children, feeding, clothing, loving and nurturing them. But each minute, till I am driven to the point of distraction, they ask me, "Mommy, will you feed us supper? Will you love us next week? If we get sick, will you take care of us? Will we have boots when winter comes?" You get the picture. My worrying in God's presence is as painful to him as such distrust would be to any mother. When I worry, I need to ask God to forgive me and to strengthen my trust in him.

How do you want your kids to remember you – wringing your hands in worry about them or folding your hands in prayer to God for them? You have a choice. By God's grace, may your praying hands become uplifted praising hands as you watch him take care of your children.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.

Artful Eye

Asparagus and Jar, *Oil on Panel. Shared by kind permission of the artist, Taryn Day. (taryndayfineart.com)*

Birthday Poem

At my age, all the good topics are taken:
"if we had world enough and time," but past
my three score that seems short; and Milton grumped
"how soon hath time" at a mere three and twenty;
and the day that Donald Hall grew older he
was younger than I am now, and that high school
musical still plays on – my musing broken
when the waiter brings our plates.
"Asparagus," you say. "Write what you know."
Asparagus, delight of Michigan's
early summer, ours for three weeks or perhaps
by strength of growing season, four, the bright
stalks the color of June, those childhood spears
now fallen like so many candles diagonal
across my plate, a demarcation
before and after, meat and potatoes,
still crisp to challenge the knife,
green arrows that lead past the plate to you.

Wiliam Harris lives in Grand Rapids where he walks his dog, helps his wife, writes the occasional poem, and teaches speech at Cornerstone University.

Plate of Asparagus with Carnations and a Grasshopper *(undated), Giovanna Garzoni, (1600 - 1670).*

Columns

My Window Seat

Mendelt Hoekstra

They saw us ... as us

We were prepared as much as possible. We decided to change the venue because the last venue in which we performed held 350 people and we almost sold out. We were hoping that the community was as excited about our concert as we were. We looked for a venue that would be comfortably accessible and had a stage large enough to hold 50 musicians. The best building we found was a church that had 1,000 seats. We thought that a 1,000 seats was optimistic but that we should do it. We thought that if each musician brought 10 people to the concert, it would fill half of the sanctuary.

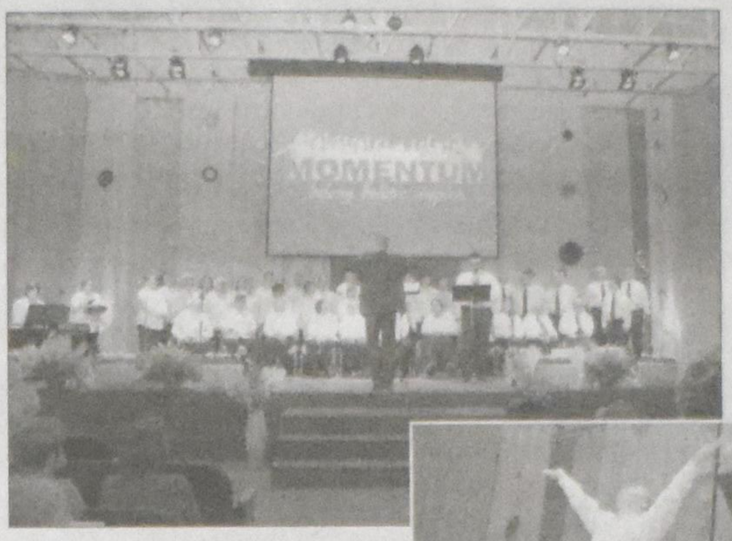
We had our new, original song "See Me as Me" rehearsed and ready. Normally during rehearsals, support staff, family and friends are allowed to watch and see the progress that happens from week to week. For the past six months, each time we rehearsed "See Me as Me", we asked all the support staff, family and friends to leave the rehearsal space so that when we performed it at our Year End Gala it would be the first time they heard it.

This show was different than any other show we have done. We spent a whole rehearsal with a videographer to tape the musicians introducing some of the songs themselves. We had slideshows to show some of the lyrics while we sang to highlight some of the words we were singing. We had a picture of all our corporate sponsor logos as well as a slide of the Momentum logo. We had background lights and spotlights. It was a multi-media show that, if it went well, was going to accent our performance and impress the audience. We did a tech run-through three hours before the concert. It was a disaster. The projector caused issues, the sound was cutting in and out and the slide show was spotty and untimed. The musicians were stressed and spending time rehearsing turning into spending time trying to manage behaviours and anxiety. *Guys, I know it's not going that well, but let's be patient. What is a tree's favourite drink? Rootbeer. What did the Police Officer say to the Popsicle? Freeze.*

While the four people at the sound and tech booth were scrambling to get things to run smoothly, the choir went to wait in the dressing rooms. I told everyone that we would be going on at 7:00 p.m. sharp and that we would line up at 6:50 to get prepared.

An amazing thing

I looked into the sanctuary at 6:45 and saw about 300 people. I was happy. 6:50



arrived and an amazing thing happened. One of the people who was working the admission table told me that cars were lined up outside waiting to park. And that they were lined up *by the hundreds.* The parking lot was overfull. The exit off the highway was 50 cars deep and the line up for people standing waiting for tickets was out the door. Showtime came and the cars were still backed up for a kilometre. I went to the stage and made the announcement that we were going to start late because we have the nicest problem we could have, people are waiting to park and walk in. The crowd cheered. I wanted to kiss them. Soon half of the sanctuary was filled. Then nearly three-quarters. At 7:20, the last – and 931st – person walked in ready to be entertained and inspired. The Mayor of St. Catharines opened the night with a welcome and some encouraging words. Momentum then went on to shine on each and every song. The audience was attentive, appreciative and in awe. "See Me as Me" produced an instantaneous standing ovation. The night was holy.

Historically, those with a disability are seen by the community as takers because of the special needs that they have. On this night, the listener was the taker. And they took inspiration to their corner of the world. Almost 1,000 people. I received an e-mail from a parent of one of the musicians the next morning. It said "My daughter woke up this morning and breakfast tasted better. Her relationships are deeper and her life is enhanced. Thank you God." Yes, thank you God.

Mendelt Hoekstra (mendelt.hoekstra@gmail.com) is the director of the Music Therapy Program at Bethesda. He lives near St. Catharines, Ont.

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer

Cultivating thanks

It is coming, sooner than I can bear. It has been breathing cold down my neck for the past six months, stealing my peace, breeding worry worry worry. I wake up in the blue of night to count the months, weeks, days left, and my joy is shot through with a sharp vein of anxiety, knowing a change is coming that I don't want to face. It is the end of maternity leave and the start of a new season I dread: daycare, working motherhood, balanced priorities.

The careworn rut in my mind, a pathway of synapses smoothed by much travel, is the pessimistic pattern I usually follow when thinking about the future. I ponder the gift of feminism – the right to work two full-time jobs simultaneously, to carry the burden of wage-earner alongside the ongoing monologue of a mother's consciousness. Returning to my career won't quiet the stream of care-tasks that flows through me: "Make baby food, put in a load of diapers, feed the baby, sterilize the soothers, put her down for a nap…." Punctuating my regular housekeeping tasks, this new set is as important to me as to my daughter, a way of loving and loving well. To reduce the quantity of my caring might be fine for the baby, but to me it will feel like settling for runner up, a diminishment of my hopes for her. I *want* to work this hard at building her life. All the equality in the world can't add more hours to a day, and so it divides me. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast? The question would not be rhetorical if there was an alternative. My career will be made burdensome by the child in my heart; my care for my child will be diminished by my career. Is this freedom?

What I dread most is the idea of putting this little being into someone else's care. I have orchestrated and mediated every experience, influence, encounter she has had to this point. I have been present for every milestone she has reached. It feels very much like a mother's right. No matter how loving and capable the caregiver, can anyone replace her mother's presence? Should anyone? It is a bitter pill, and I don't want to swallow it. It steals my joy and darkens the gift of this year with her.

Eucharisteo

So speaks the voice in my head, but it is not the voice I want to live by, worrying about a tomorrow that has not yet unfolded. I don't know what the Lord has in store, and I believe there must be a way into abundant life, a way of gratefulness for now and hope for the future. Ann Voskamp calls it *eucharisteo*, the practice of giving thanks in all circumstances: "The brave who focus on all things good and all things beautiful and all things true, even in the small, who give thanks for it and discover joy even in the here and now, they are the change agents who bring fullest Light to all the world." My love of Christ should translate into joy and thankfulness, must translate, and that it does not reflects my lack of faith and, yes, my lack of love. I give intellectual assent to the good future bought by Jesus' blood, but I don't live it, it hasn't worn a path through my synapses as yet. I confess that I am a pessimist at heart – or maybe just at head – and the road into change will be long. Thank God for mercy, for time, and for the process of sanctification. I can practice walking this way, I can practice thankfulness.

So let me follow your example, Ann, and count gifts. Today I am thankful for peonies bending along my walkway, still heavy with fragrance though browning. I am thankful for the strip of blue bay, lit by morning sun, now visible through my bathroom window. For an hour, while the

little one naps, to mill brown rice and boil it into cereal, and for stacks of homemade pea puree in the freezer. For a year of paid freedom to dawdle in bed with a rosy baby who pulls at my hair and laughs. And Lord, I am also thankful for a job to return to, a job that carries mortgage payments and stocks the pantry. I am thankful that my worst worry is sharing the care of my child, not wondering how I will feed her tomorrow. I am grateful for every single beautiful day of this year with my daughter, knowing that each moment with her is an unmerited gift, and there is nothing real to fear. Thank you. Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is indebted to Ann Voskamp's book One Thousand Gifts *for opening her eyes to the practice of thankfulness.*

Columns

The Public Square

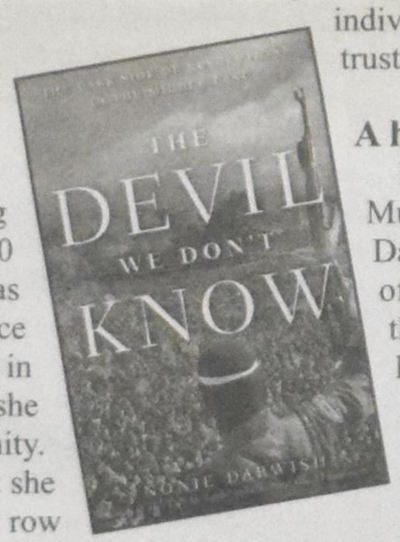
Harry Antonides

Review of *The Devil We Don't Know: The Dark Side of Revolutions in the Middle East*

It isn't easy to figure out what is really happening in the turmoil of the Middle East. Is the Arab Spring really taking hold, or is it a case of one kind of dictatorship being replaced by another, perhaps a worse one? It's hard to know amidst the conflicting claims of the various contestants. That's why this book by Nonie Darwish should be read eagerly by all who look for clarity about one of the most consequential and controversial issues of our time.

The author leaves no doubt about her position by beginning her book with this blunt statement: "Revolutions across the Middle East are rapidly unravelling before our eyes, telling us the sad truth that Islamic uprisings eventually crawl back to where they came from – back to tyranny." She then spends 225 pages providing the evidence for her position. Why should we believe her?

Escape from tyranny



Nonie Darwish speaks from experience, having lived her first 30 years in Egypt as a Muslim. Since 1978 she has lived in America, where she embraced Christianity. You might say that she has had a front row seat on the world-scale struggle between freedom and tyranny.

Darwish was born into a Muslim family in Egypt where her father was a military officer. He was killed when she was eight years old. She was able to obtain a good education, and became increasingly disconnected from Islam – which she began to see as a fear-driven religion that stifled all true cultural development. She and her family immigrated to America in 1978, a move she described in her previous book, *Now They Call me Infidel*, as follows:

"During my first two years in America, my sudden exposure to the freedom of religion and social and racial equality in America made me realize to what degree Muslim society oppressed, shamed and manipulated its citizens.... Moving to America was like being catapulted to another time in history. America was not just a place for making money ... it was a place for becoming a human being."

Especially after 9/11 Darwish began to speak out publicly about what lies behind that horrendous crime against America. The purpose of The *Devil We Don't Know*, she writes, is not "simply ... to point out Islam's failures in order to tear it down." First of all, she wants to explain the revolutions in the Middle East and to expose the real Islam for what it is: "a belief system that will inevitably doom those revolutions. Islam and its sharia cannot coexist with freedom and democracy."

Darwish writes with candour about growing up in Egypt where she experienced the destructive impact of Islam on every aspect of life, including the most intimate aspects of marriage and family. She explains how and why the Islamic notion of sharia law, which seeks to combine religion and politics, destroys all privacy, individual initiative and trust among people.

A house of cards?

In the chapter "A Muslim's Burden," Darwish lists a number of demands and duties that include the following: vengeance, reforming others rather than oneself, the sin of admitting sin, redemption in Islam, distrust of novelty and the other, criminalization of love and beauty, the duty of protecting Muhammad's honour.

In the chapter "House of Cards," Darwish points out that Islam has a built-in tendency of self-destruction, which it tries to prevent by making apostasy (leaving Islam) a crime worthy of death. To expose the misery and suffering, especially of girls and women, under such a system is to invite hatred and being demonized even in the free West.

Darwish argues that the ingrained Jew-hatred in the Muslim world can be traced back to Muhammad's anger about the Jews' refusal to become his followers. One of his final instructions before his death was "kill the Jews." That's why sharia and ingrained Jew-hatred are inseparable. This will not change as long as jihad is one of the foundation blocks of Islam.

Darwish is in touch with many Muslims and former Muslims still forced to live in Muslim countries from which there is no escape. The sense of helplessness and despair comes through in the letters for help she receives. Here is one of them:

"Please help me. I've got to get out! I'm a Muslim and I left Islam and please, brothers, help me out from the prison of Pakistan."

This is an extraordinarily fine book, written not in anger against all the evil done in the name of Islam but out of love for the author's estranged family and for those still in bondage to a cruel ideology of power and control. It lets the light of truth shine on a very dark subject that many would rather ignore or cover with lies.

Harry Antonides is the former director of research and education for the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC).

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien

True no-till acreage declining

The conventional (or "old") way of seeding started by ploughing the field in the Fall and working it up with a disk or cultivator in the Spring. When the ground was warm and nicely worked up it was planted with a seed drill. In the last 10-20 years – more like 10 in Ontario – many farmers took up another method known as "no-till" (no tillage).

In no-till seeding the soil is not disturbed. A no-till drill is a heavy machine that makes little furrows (that's not what they're called but should give a good idea) about an inch or two deep and the width of the seed. Seeds fall into it and are then covered by a press wheel. Soybeans, wheat, canola and grain crops can be no-tilled into last year's corn crop stalks, and no-till will also work planting directly into sod (hayfields) after a Roundup burndown (killing all the vegetation – but this isn't being done as much as it used to be).

The no-till philosophy is that the ground should stay intact, which means less or no wind and water erosion. It also saves on fuel and labour costs, requiring only one pass over the field with a large horsepower tractor. But as crop yields increase, more and more farmers are finding no-till seeding impractical.

Back in 1970, 100 bushels of corn per acre was a dandy crop yield. That's the year I started farming full-time. Corn trash or residue wasn't a big concern then; it was chopped up and ploughed down. By 1990 or so, 100 bushels an acre was deemed to be a poor-yielding crop. And by the early 2000s if you had a 100-bushel crop you were not making money. If you've had that yield in recent years you were losing money. Lower yields are usually the result of long extended dry spells with little or no precipitation. A good "soaker" during the summer months is what farmers refer to as "a million dollar rain."

Eastern Ontario corn growers are now getting 150-200 bushels per acre and a few even topped 240 bushels. Now the quest is on for 300 bushels. Seed companies and crop scientists say it's possible. They say growing 200 bushels can be accomplished with good management. For 300 bushels farmers will need cleaner fields, better plant nutrition and higher plant populations. Seed companies have developed corn with new triple stack hybrids that are producing healthier roots and thereby higher grain corn yields.

The huge problem with the high yielding corn crop is the trash. According to my math, 100 bushels an acre produces about three tonnes of trash per acre. Two hundred bushels leaves about six tonnes of trash per acre. If the mat of residue stays on the surface it makes it difficult to no-till a crop into the ground the following spring. The stuff will have to be chopped up, disked down, removed or ploughed down. And there goes the no-till philosophy.

It's already happening.

Monster plough

Two years ago at the Ottawa Valley Farm Show in Ottawa, I saw a very long 10-furrow prototype plough on display near the entrance gate. It was a plough built for turning over corn stalks and trash. A sign on the plough said it was sold. List price was $85,000. Curious to know who had bought the monster plough I sought out the salesman inside the building who told me that a cash-cropper with 2,000 acres of corn had bought the plough.

A no-till seed drill in action

I thought cash croppers with huge acreages were into no-till and rotated their crops. Didn't no-till replace tillage and ploughing?

The corn grower found he was getting too much tough fibrous residue from his Bt corn (corn that has been genetically modified to protect against insects). The residue wouldn't break down and rot.

Now we're seeing a whole new line of tillage tools on the market that are called vertical tillage machines. They are designed to cut through corn residue and leave a good spot for seeds to germinate. Most of these machines have fluted style disks, harrows and basket harrows.

On a cold spring day a local machinery dealer dropped in for a visit to where I was doing some fencing. As usual, we talked about crops, machinery, high crop input costs, no-till, tillage and ploughing. He commented that we've come full circle. Some dealers in southern Ontario are not able to sell no-till drills. There's no interest in them, he said. But the dealers are increasingly selling big ploughs. "We're back to ploughing," he said.

Many growers have found that their no-till soybeans were yielding considerably less when planted into a heavy mat of corn residue. Soybeans planted on

...Continued on p.16

Where two or three are gathered

Dora Stroobosscher

One of the benefits of being in a different culture is that you can take the opportunity to experience a variety of worship services.

On the first Sunday of our recent trip to South Africa, my husband Marc and I drove to Pretoria and finally found what we were looking for. The large Reformed church was surrounded by other buildings which told us that this had once been a vibrant church community: a very large *pastorie*, an eight-room guest house, and a functional kitchen attached to an outdoor *lapa*. A high fence topped with barbed wire surrounded the complex, a visible, though silent declaration that this is now an unsafe area. This also explained why all these buildings had been abandoned.

In spite of that, Pastor Derrick Mashau has been appointed by the Reformed Theological Seminary at Potchefstroom to establish an Urban Mission Centre here. Outreach ministry has not been a strong aspect of the GKSA (Reformed Church of South Africa) but at this centre, Pastor Mashau will now be training young pastors how to be effective on the streets as well as in the pulpit. His kids have to get used to playing only within the compound and miss being able to ride their bikes around freely. Their mother, a trained teacher, is working with a team of five women to open a Christian crèche (age 0-4), a small beginning toward reclaiming the area for Christ. In South Africa, a well-run crèche often develops into a full K-12 school.

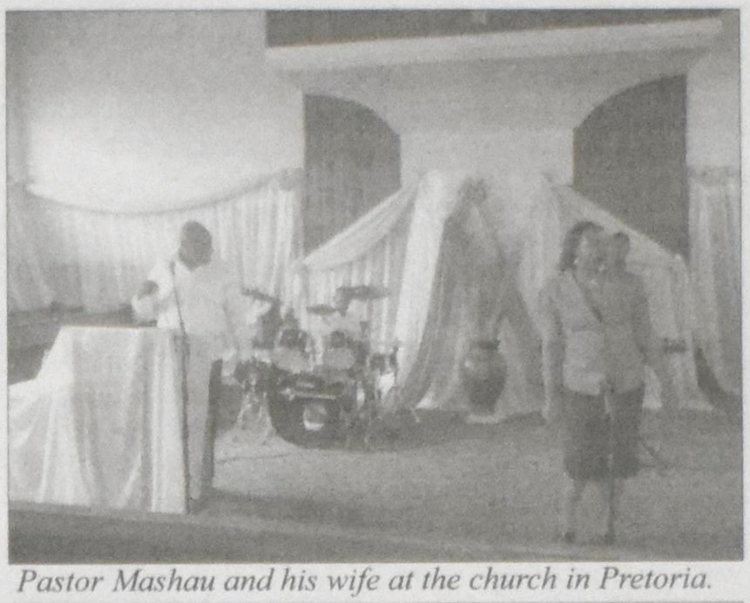
The capitalized word "Reformed" still carries a lot of baggage with it in South Africa. For many years, this denomination supported apartheid policies and white supremacy, and for that reason this new church is simply and fittingly called *New Life Church*. The service "began" at 10 a.m. with a one-woman praise team whose powerful voice rang out through open windows to bring people in. The service had a familiar feel about it: reading of the law, reciting the Apostles' Creed together, and a congregational prayer.

Pastor Mashau preached on Genesis 3:9. "Adam, where are you?" This is a question God poses to his people everywhere, even today. No matter where you are, at work or play, in kitchen or office, God asks, "Where are you right now in relationship to me? Are you still close to me or have you shut me out of this aspect of your life?" The spirited singing and spontaneous dancing may not have been too "Reformed," but the sermon would have warmed the heart of anyone longing for culturally relevant, transformational preaching. About 150 people attended the two-hour service.

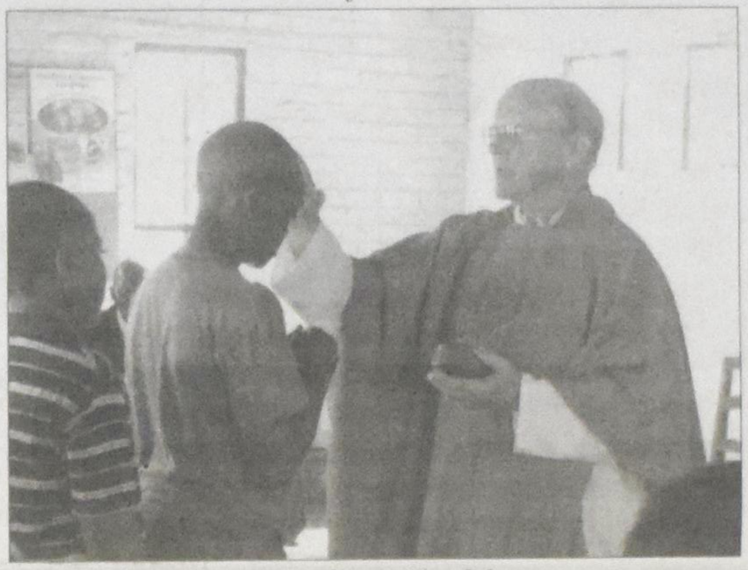
Translated Dutch hymns

On the second Sunday of our trip, we walked to the small white Reformed Church located just outside the home of Pastor and Mrs. Ligege, our hosts. Pastor Ligege is the only ordained pastor for seven Reformed churches in the area and preaches at one of these churches every Sunday. He has trained some elders to preach at the other six.

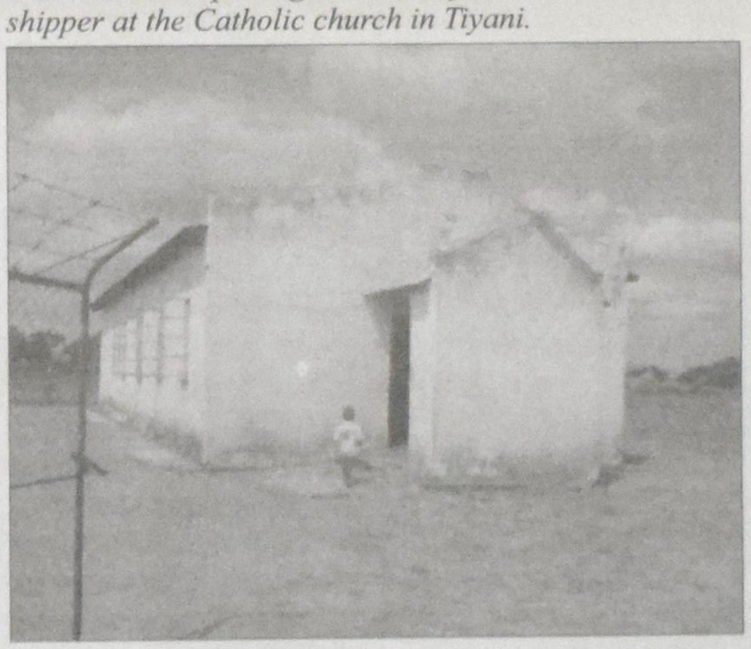
The service began promptly at 8:30 a.m. with six people in the pews. As the service progressed, some more adults and children wandered in. A very traditional liturgy was followed, one that never changes from Sunday to Sunday. The hymns were of Dutch origin, translated into Venda. Since the melodies were familiar and the language phonetic, we are able to sing along with those wonderful African voices. Mr. Thenga, a very capable and articulate elder, preached on Psalm 27:4: "I want to dwell in the house of the Lord forever." His message echoed Pastor Mashau's from the week before. Do you want to be with God in whatever you do? He preached in Venda but translated freely into English. The service lasted exactly one hour.



Pastor Mashau and his wife at the church in Pretoria.



Father Thomas putting the mark of the cross on a worshipper at the Catholic church in Tiyani.



The Apostolic Church of Christ in Nkuzana.

About 20 adults and a number of children attended.

The following Sunday, we travelled a short distance to Nkuzane, a large rural village close to Theocentric Christian College. Francis Maume, a teacher at Theo, is from Zimbabwe and lives here with two of his school-aged children. His wife Martha, also a teacher, still lives in Zimbabwe with a third little girl. Their deepest wish is that someday soon the family can be together again. In the meantime, Francis has found a home away from home in the Apostolic Church of Christ.

The small white-washed building sits rather forlornly in the middle of an open field. The service began at 11 a.m. with highly amplified singing that continued for the next half hour. The pastor was late since he first had to preach in another village. While we waited, we listened to testimonies and spontaneous musical contributions. A group of men sang a moving version of the spiritual "Someboody's Calling My Name." At 12:30, the pastor arrived and chose a number of different texts for the theme of his sermon: "What kind of war are we fighting? Do not fight flesh and blood. Our battle is spiritual!" He preached in English, and an interpreter delivered the message into Shangaan. At times, the two voices blended into one, both in passion and volume, and the congregation responded with many affirmative "Amens" and "Hallelujahs!" About 100 people attended the three-hour service.

Catholic Mass

On another Sunday, we joined a fellow teacher at her church in Tiyani. We formed a line outside, and then entered the small church building in a very solemn procession. Father Thomas, an Irish priest, was in charge of the service. The Roman Catholic liturgy was tightly constructed with readings and prayers. Since this was the first Sunday of Lent, palm branches were burned in a small fire that was made on the concrete floor of the church. The ashes were then gathered into an urn and Father Thomas invited all the congregants to come up and receive the sign of the cross on their foreheads. His sermon was titled "Living in the Shadow of the Cross." He challenged us to leave the mark of the cross on our foreheads for a few days and to be ready to share with anyone who asked about it why it was there.

South African style singing and dancing demonstrated a freedom of worship expression that would probably not be found in most traditional Catholic churches, but when it came to the celebration of the Mass tradition prevailed. Our friend, rather apologetically, informed us that *only the Romans are allowed to partake*. About 100 people attended the service, which lasted two hours.

While in South Africa we also attended an open-air service. A variety of colourful birds provided the praise music, the trees of the fields clapped their hands and all creation preached about the mighty power of a loving God. The lake in front of us sparkled with joy and one curious crocodile floated by just to see what was going on. Only Marc and I attended and the service lasted all morning. The text? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I with them." (Matt.18:20)

Dora Stroobosscher and her husband Marc were in South Africa for the months of January, February and March on behalf of EduDeo, offering workshops and mentoring teachers in Theocentric Christian College, a black Christian high school.

No-till acreage....continued from p. 15

ploughed or worked up soils can give up to a 10-bushel yield increase over no-till beans. They also found that no-till requires more herbicides on GMO soybeans.

While some growers still strongly believe in no-till, this spring I saw a lot of ground worked up and seeding done with a no-till drill … and then rolled. Some farmers till the soil lightly before seeding with a no-till drill. One operator in my area has a set of disks in front of his no-till drill.

A buddy of mine, John Van Genderen, a former crop advisor, says true no-till acreage has been declining in recent years due to farmers experiencing lower yields compared to normal tillage. He said farmers are using their no-till drill in conventional tillage because of consistent planting depth resulting in more uniform emergence.

Van Genderen also says there are some areas that are almost totally no-till and believes it's related to soil type and general environmental conditions.

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew-area farmer and agricultural writer. He is booked on a bus tour of northern Ontario and a rail excursion on the Polar Bear Express train from Cochrane to Moosonee (James Bay).

Classifieds

Birthday

Happy 80th Birthday

Johanna Goris

On July 17, 2012 D.V.
Johanna will celebrate her 80th birthday.

We pray that the Lord will continue to bless you Mom!
Betty and Dave Buis
Jerry Goris
Nancy and Hubert Krygsman
Henriett and Dave Vanderlei
Annette and Jack Bakker
Loraine and Rick Guikema
Love also from her growing family of 16 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren (and counting...)

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Ps 90:1

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Anniversaries

HAPPY 55th WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

1957 July 26th 2012
Owen Sound, Ont. Chatham, Ont.

Psalm 127:1

With thankfulness to God for his faithfulness, we celebrate the **55th anniversary** of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

HANK AND SHENA DEBOER
(nee Neerhof)

HARRY and HILDA DEBOER
Carlene and Frank (Elijah, Eden)
Lindsay and Tim (Annalia)
Brianne

KEN and JANICE DEBOER
Kevin, Krista

RON and KAREN DEBOER
Stephanie, Samantha, Kailey, Tara

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109-3260 New St. Burlington ON L7N 3L4
905-681-0311
Email: rvanderwoerd@gmail.com

July 13, 2012
With Joy, Love, and Gratitude
we announce the
60th wedding anniversary of

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George & Florie Dekker
Peter, Heather, Tina
Evelyn Dekker & Wayne Harris
Sietzka, Leah, Naomi
Gwendolyn Dekker & Don Vanderklok
Jozina & Francis
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Marijke
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Justin, Lucas

Congratulations may be sent to:
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Obituary

For as in Adam all die,
so in Christ all will be made alive.
1 Corinthians 15:22

In His infinite wisdom and mercy, and in the arms of a loving Saviour, God called to his eternal home on June 21st, 2012, his child

Margaret Buys

in her 77th year.

Beloved wife for 55 years of William Buys of Beamsville.

Dear mother of: Margo and Tim Janssens; Bill and Joany, Kathy and Peter Kralt, Brian, Carl and Ann, Dave and Linda, Mark and Sandra, Joanne† (1971), John and Glenna, Darrell and Christine, and Trevor.

Cherished 'Grandma' and 'Oma' of 38 grandchildren and great-grandma to five great-grandchildren.

Funeral service was held at Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church, Jordan Ont. on Tuesday June 26th.

Donations can be made to Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Ave, Grimsby Ont, L3M 4N5, her loving home for the past year.

On-line condolences can be left at TallmanFuneralHomes.ca

Correspondence: William Buys
4271 Village Park Dr,
Beamsville ON L0R 1B8

1952 July 10 2012
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Sarah Joy & Adam Harris, Nathan, Christy

Eric and Carolyn Groot-Nibbelink
Jenica, Michelle, Carissa

Elna Groot-Nibbelink

But now, Lord, what do I look for?
My hope is in you. Psalm 39:7

Address: 15146 Loyalist Parkway
Bloomfield ON K0K 1G0

Obituary

July 22, 1922 June 6, 2012
Amsterdam, NL Stratford, Ont.

The Lord called home

Alida (Ada) Geleynse (nee Pouwels)

in her 90th year.

Beloved wife of Rev. Martin D. Geleynse for almost 62 years.

Dear mother of:
Ellie & Gerard Duiker – Toronto, Ont.
Bart Geleynse – Osgoode, Ont.
Carel & Irene Geleynse – Kitchener, Ont.
Tina† (2000) & John Aukema – London, Ont.
Nick & Fanny Geleynse – Clinton, Ont.
Anneke & John Oegema – Rapid City, S. Dakota
Andy & Yvonne Geleynse – Blackfalds, Alta.
John & Melanie Geleynse – Saratoga, Calif.
Jeff Geleynse – Stratford, Ont.

Dear grandmother of 34 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was held on Sunday evening, June 10, 2012 in the Stratford Christian Reformed Church, led by Pastor Bill Hoogland. We are comforted by the fact that Ada was a child of the King!
"Great is Your Faithfulness"

Correspondence: Martin D. Geleynse
219 - 639 West Gore St.
Stratford ON N5A 7N2

The 7th annual Dutch Hymn Sing

Wednesday **August 29** at 1:30 p.m

will be held, the Lord willing, at Westmount Christian Reformed Church,
405 Drury Lane, Strathroy, ON.
Everyone is welcome!

Come and sing the old favourites that you learned as a child and that have nourished your faith throughout the years.

If you wish to have additional information contact Marianne Kingma
jmkingma7@gmail.com or **519-245-0139**

Advertising

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Responsibilities focus on pastoral care, leadership in elder visitation, hospitality, and mentoring/training in these ministries along with preaching an average of once per month.

To see job description, go to website at **trinitycrc.ca** and look under ministry opportunities.

For additional information or to submit a letter of interest and resume, email: **office@trinitycrc.ca** attention Len Kamp.

Director of Youth Ministries

Talbot Street Christian Reformed Church (formerly First CRC) is a large and vibrant congregation in downtown London, Ontario, with a recently renovated facility which has given us new opportunities for ministry and outreach. We are looking for a part-time (20 hours per week) Director of Youth Ministries, who will be responsible for the planning, organization, execution, and evaluation of our youth ministry programs within the parameters of our mission to "Discover Christ and Grow in Him."

Please visit our website for a detailed job description (**talbotstreetchurch.com**).

For more information or to submit an application, contact the search committee by e-mail at careers@talbotstreetchurch.com.

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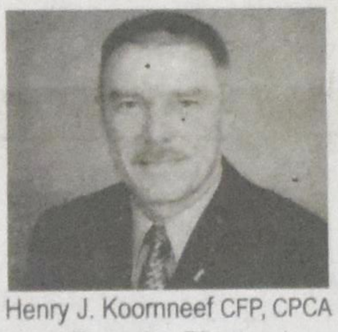

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Aug 29 The 7th annual Dutch Hymn Sing will be held, the Lord willing, at Westmount Christian Reformed Church, **Strathroy,** ON. 1:30 p.m. Come and sing the old favourites that you learned as a child and that have nourished yourfaith throughout the years. If you wish to have additional information contact Marianne Kingma - jmkingma7@gmail.com or 519-245-0139

Sep 18 " Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Musica Sacra Chorus". **Ancaster**, Redeemer College Auditorium at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep19 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Grimsby**, Mountainview Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm. See hollandchristianmalechoir.com

Sep 21 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Brampton**, Holland Christian Homes at 1:30 pm See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sept 21 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Liberation Choir" with Sharon Sandink director. **Georgetown** Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm.

Sep 22 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. Durham Christian Homes, **Whitby** at 1:30 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 24 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp. First Christian Reformed Church, **Kingston**, at 8 pm. See: www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 26 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp and "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" with Margaret van Dyk as director. Calvin Christian Reformed Church, **Ottawa** at 8 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 27 "Good By Evening" "Holland Christian Male Choir" Freddy Veldkamp as director. Cephas Christian Reformed Church, **Peterborough** at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Nov 2 Christian Festival Concert 7:30 pm. Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**. See ad for more details.

Summer salad with goat cheese
Zomersalade met geitenkaas

200 grams / 7 oz. goat cheese
7 grams / ¼ oz. fresh mint
3 nectarines
4 tbls walnut oil
½ lemon
1 tbsp honey
75 grams / 3 oz. mixed salad
75 grams / 3 oz. fresh rucola
55 grams / 2 oz. walnuts
black pepper

Prepare the goat cheese by cutting it into long slivers of about 1/3" wide. Strip the mint leaves from the sprigs. Peel the nectarines and divide them in segments.
Heat a heavy skillet or stovetop grill pan. Thinly brush the nectarine segments with about 1 tbsp walnut oil. Grill them for a minute each side and take from the pan.

Squeeze the half lemon over a salad bowl, add honey, walnut oil, fresh ground black pepper and salt to taste and whish into a smooth dressing.
Gently fold in the cheese, salad, rucola, mint and walnuts.

Put the salad into four bowls and garnish with the grilled nectarine segments. Serve with a wholewheat baguette and a fruity wine such as Sangria.

Variation: add parts of other fruits, such as slice strawberries, pieces of apple and/or blueberries.

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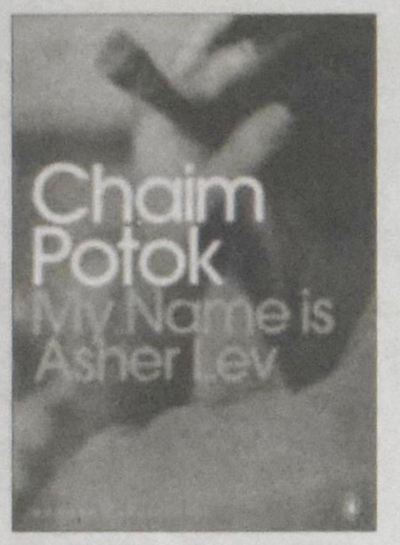
Features

Summer reading recommendations

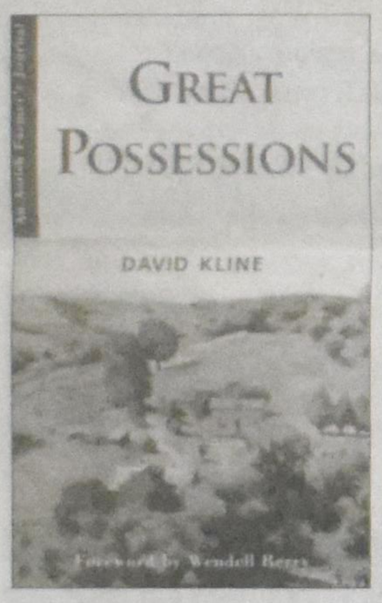
Hot, hazy days at the beach, cottage or campground are perfect for sitting down with a good book. In case you're looking for just the right book to fill that role, we asked *Christian Courier* staff members for some summer reading recommendations. Here's what they came up with:

Emily Cramer recommends:
My Name is Asher Lev
by Chaim Potok



Summer is a great time for a read, or re-read, of this astonishingly powerful novel about a boy prodigy caught between his faith tradition and his gift for art. Set in New York City in the '60s, its sparse and almost plodding first-person narrative somehow manages to be taut with portent. This is a masterfully crafted novel in itself, but also an important discussion of the boundaries around truth-telling and the priorities between cultural and moral interpretations of holiness.

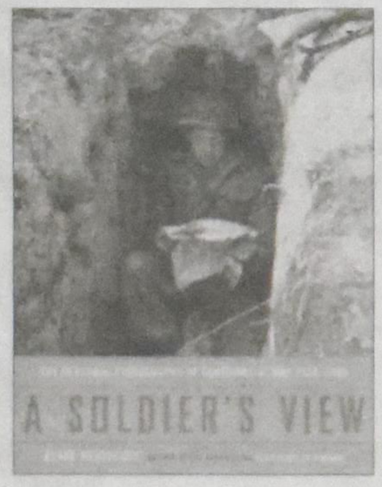
Curt Gesch recommends:



Great Possessions: An Amish Farmer's Journal
by David Kline

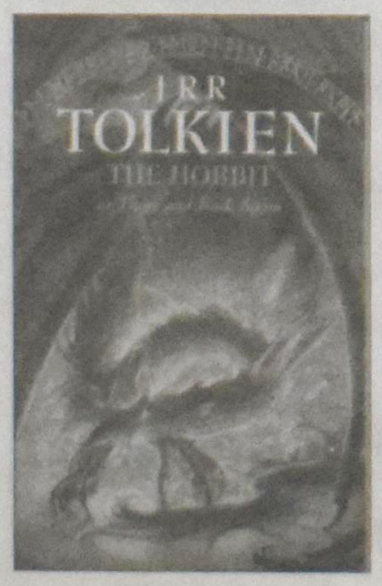
Observations by a modern, successful Amish farmer who has time for children, bird-watching and community building. David Kline lives a God-centred life that many of us dream about, but sometimes dismiss as unrealistic. David Kline and his God are very real, however, as real as soil, muskrats, killdeer, warblers, horse manure and violets.

Meindert van der Galien:
A Soldier's View
by Blake Heathcote



I bought this book at a book sale recently. It isn't a "fun" summer read, but a rather serious one with lots of remarkable photos taken by soldiers during the Second World War.

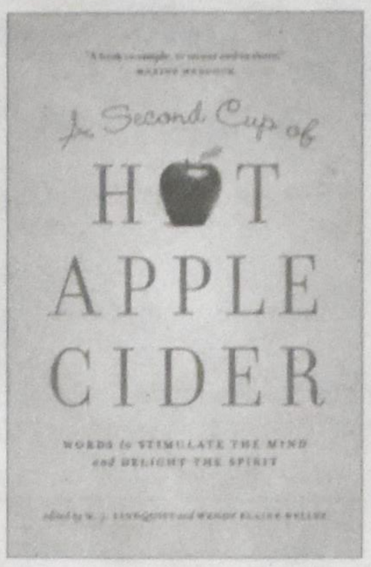
Bert Hielema recommends:



The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings
by J.R.R. Tolkien

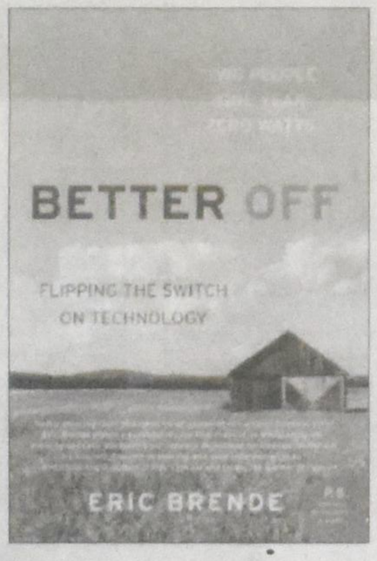
Some 40 years ago I read to my youngest kids the entire Tolkien series, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy – twice. Every evening for more than a year. I couldn't find them anymore so I now bought a new set and just finished *The Hobbit* and started part one of *The Lord of the Rings*. Fascinating stuff.

Heidi Vander Slikke recommends:
A Second Cup of Hot Apple Cider
edited by N.J. Lindquist and Wendy Nelles



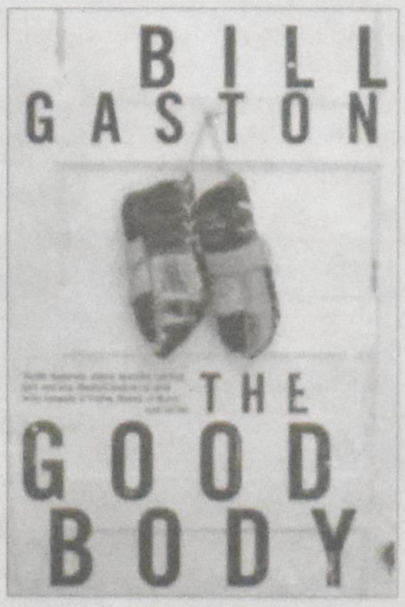
This sequel to *Hot Apple Cider* is now an award winning best seller on its own. This is a collection of short stories, memoirs and poetry contributed by various professional members of The Word Guild (www.thewordguild.com). With so many authors, there's something to delight every reader. The short story format lends itself perfectly to leisurely afternoons on the beach or evenings by the campfire.

Derek Schuurman recommends:
Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology
by Eric Brende



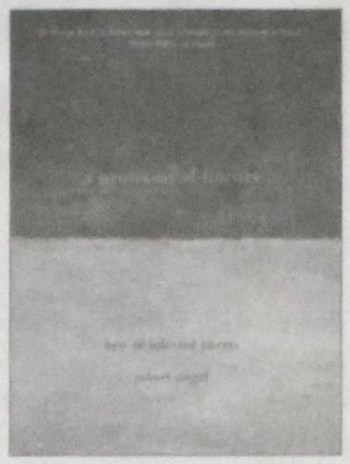
This is a thoughtful book about an MIT graduate who wonders if there might be a baseline of technology below which life is too physically demanding and above which machines begin to create their own demands. He then embarks on a real-life experiment together with his newly-wed wife as they move to a remote rural Amish community for 18 months. The book is an articulate and engaging account of the struggles and benefits of leaving the world of modern technology behind.

Michael Buma recommends:
The Good Body
by Bill Gaston



The Good Body is the story of Bobby Bonaduce, an aging minor league professional hockey player who enrols in a graduate program in English literature so he can play university hockey with a son he hardly knows. There's lots of potential for sloppy sentimentality here, but Gaston handles this scenario with humour, insight and charm. I've actually written a book about hockey novels, so I've read pretty much all of them. *The Good Body* is my favourite.

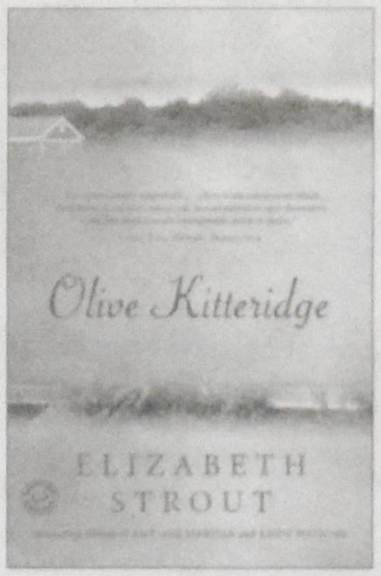
Nick Schuurman recommends:
A Pentecost of Finches
by Robert Siegel



This little collection from poet and educator Robert Siegel allows for pause in what can be the most distraction-filled of seasons. He invites the reader to be still and attentive to the poetry of creation's order and beauty, be it a watersnake, June graduation ceremony or communion wafer.

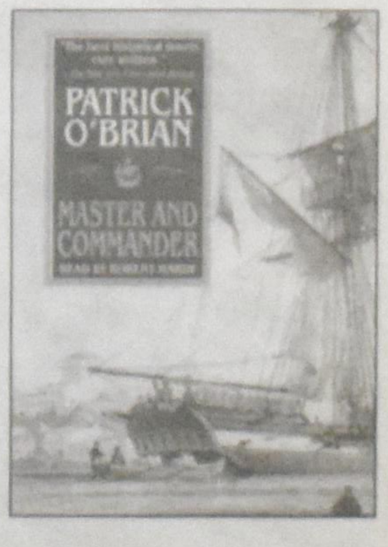
Rudy Eikelboom recommends:
Everything That Rises Must Converge
by Flannery O'Connor

If on a summer evening you like a shot of a smooth but potent liquor – a single malt whiskey or a fine cognac, then this book of short stories is for you. This book is a reissue, but like a fine aged liquor, the stories now seem to be a stronger, purer reflection of the current age. I could only read one story at a time.



Cathy Smith recommends:
Olive Kitteridge
by Elizabeth Strout

This Pulitzer Prize-winner is profound but accessible, funny and sad, glowing with keen love for small-town life. Follow retired schoolteacher Olive Kitteridge around Crosby, Maine and watch as she interacts with people who could be your neighbours, or even you.

Marian Van Til recommends:
The historical sea novels of Patrick O'Brian

Starting with *Master and Commander*, there are 20 books in one ongoing, intriguing, beautifully written story as Britain fights Napoleon. The focus is on the friendship between violin-playing Royal Navy captain Jack Aubrey and his cellist ship's surgeon Stephen Maturin. Character development is superb, the sea/ship stuff fascinating, and the accuracy of period dialogue and details nearly mind-boggling. (And if you start in the summer, you'll get to relish the whole series for months!)